

A STRANGER TO MYSELF

This is the story of a murder—a murder the American police and public thought peculiarly brutal and sordid. It is also the story of what happens when the United States police want a confession and of how a murder case is conducted. It is not a book for readers who choose to ignore the fact that squalor, meanness and brutality exist in the world. But it is a story about real people—decent people and rotten people.

Paul Weiler was a successful writer of true detective stories. He was good at his job and he had friends at police headquarters who gave him more than enough material for the stories he wrote. Then a ghoul of an editor sent him to interview a woman who belonged to the world about which he wrote. Caught by her questionable attractions, Paul found it was possible for a while to live a double life. It was possible to live with Ginnie, his wife whom he loved, and to visit Mrs. Crisponi—whose husband had gone to the electric chair. Paul grew to hate himself for this deception. But then something happened which threatened to end his life with Ginnie and to take him away from his job and his friends—there was only one way out.

This astonishing story moves to its conclusion with the inevitable logic of a Greek tragedy.

A STRANGER TO MYSELF

A Novel by

SEYMOUR SHUBIN



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To
My Mother and Father

The characters and situations in this book are wholly fictional and imaginative: do not portray and are not intended to portray, any actual persons, organisations, or parties.

CHAPTER ONE

MY mouth had a dry velvety taste and there was an ache in the muscles of my back, as if I had twisted and writhed throughout the night. I knew that my sleep had been filled with many disturbing dreams, but the only one I could recall in any form was Ginny in my car, suddenly crying and flinging open the door and running toward her house and into the arms of someone who did not look like her mother but who I sensed actually was. That dream even in the haze of those waking moments did not puzzle me at all.

I pulled away the cover and went to the window. The thin jagged border of sky above the buildings across from my hotel was grey and dismal; it had rained earlier and the street six floors below was still wet and shiny. Street noises drifted up; even shutting the window did not clip them off entirely. Automobiles shuttled back and forth, people scurried to work. It was almost nine o'clock. There was no mistaking the fabric of a Monday morning.

A shower refreshed me physically but not mentally, for I was thinking of Ginny and if she would call with good news. She had promised to get in touch with me early: if anything had happened, that is. I dressed slowly, giving the phone plenty of opportunity to ring.

Later, downstairs in the lobby, Mr. Hanson behind the desk smiled efficiently and handed me a letter that was in my slot. It was from *Squadcar Detective Stories Magazine*. I tore it open, wondering what Davenport wanted, and found that it held a sealed letter addressed to me: to Bob Simons, but still me. Bob Simons was one of my pen names. First I read Davenport's note, which was clipped to the inner envelope.

Dear Paul,

Enclosed is a letter from your public.

I read your Stavinski safe-cracking yarn and think it's top-drawer stuff. What's the story on art? Incidentally, anything new on the Peterson case?

Sincerely,
HOWARD

I put the note in my pocket and opened the other letter, which was postmarked Peoria, Illinois. It was written in pencil on lined paper, in an almost illegible scrawl.

Dear Mr. Simons,

I read your story "Body, Body—Who's Got the Body?" in the last issue of the *Squadcar Magazine* and liked it very much. You are among my favourites especially because your detectives are always so polite, which I like.

The reason I am writing this is to ask could you tell me how to be a private investigator. I think I have the stuff but don't know how to begin. Would appreciate a answer.

Yrs.,

A. H. HEMBILL

P.S. Thanking you in advance.

My *public*. I shook my head, crumpled the letter into a wad and tossed it into the sand-filled urn next to the desk. "Remember this," Davenport always used to say, "remember that you're writing for the twelve-year-old mind. Everything must be clear, every point rounded out. Never use a four-syllable word when you can use one with two." Sometimes I forgot.

I bought a newspaper and went into the coffee shop. The Peterson murder was featured on the front page. I read it while I had breakfast: orange juice and black coffee. This business with Ginny was unnerving me.

Afterwards I stopped at the desk again. "Any calls for me?"

Mr. Hanson shook his head.

Back in my room I clipped out the Peterson story and put it on the bed. Then lighting my pipe I took from my desk the short fiction piece I'd been working on the day before; but even reading it was an effort and I put it away. I tilted the chair back. Had I been crazy that night?

Ginny and I on the sofa, her parents asleep upstairs. . . .

At first she had begged me not to and then she put her arms around me tightly and kissed me hard. And just as quickly was it over; and in that moment I had realised that it was not the way I had wanted it with her, not the beautiful and the perfect way; and all at once she was crying and the only thing I could think to do was put my hand over her mouth so that her parents would not hear. . . .

The legs of the chair dropped forward and I stood up, agitated. Why had I let myself go like that? Actually, even though Ginny and I had been seeing each other steadily for almost three months, I felt that we knew little about one another. She saw me as a writer and a fairly successful one at that; which meant she did not know me at all. As for her, I knew her only as an extremely pretty girl with a relatively new degree in sociology and a brand new job with the Department of Public Assistance; a girl with many ideals and much enthusiasm. Yet there was something in her eyes, a solemnity even when she laughed, that made me realise she was as much a stranger to me as I was to her. I walked to the window. It was starting to rain again, gently, almost a mist. I felt like a monster and wondered if that sad little affair of a moment had destroyed everything. Fervently I hoped against it, for what I did know of Ginny I loved, and the mystery of what lay beneath intrigued me. I wondered though if I would ever find out, now. Had I lost my chance? I pressed my forehead against the damp chill window. Yet . . . had it been all my fault? All of it? She could have stopped me; certainly if she had really wanted to she could have stopped me.

The phone was ringing.

I picked it up quickly, my heart leaping. The operator said, "Mr. Paul Weiler, please. New York calling."

Disappointment surged through me. I said, "On the phone," and instinctively reached for a pencil.

"One moment, please," the operator was saying. I could hear a faint, "Go ahead."

"Paul?" Davenport's voice sounded cheerful for so early in the morning.

"Hello, Howard, how are you?" Davenport always insisted that I call him by his first name; yet, despite our close friendship, I still felt a little strange when I did. It was as though I were being too familiar with my own father.

"No complaints, Paul, no complaints at all. Say, I see where the Peterson case has broken wide open. How's it look to you?"

"To tell you the truth I don't know. The paper doesn't give too many details how the cops got on to this Crisponi. It just says they picked him up and he went for it."

"Look into it and let me know as soon as you can, will you? The murder was a lulu and it got a good play in all the papers here. Every book'll be hot after it and I'd like to beat the field if I can.

The angle about a dog digging up the body is something out of this world. In fact I've been playing around with a title. *Who's That Barking on My Grave?* What do you think?"

"Terrific." I was forcing. I made a few doodlings on the back of an envelope.

"Well, we'll see. Look, this issue closes on the twelfth. That gives you about a week. So let me know as soon as possible if I can expect the copy. If the facts don't stack up, I'll want to schedule something else. There's a case out in Missouri I can use. A girl was raped and murdered or the other way around, I don't know. Anyway, the killer beat her up and strangled her with her own garter belt. It's a dandy, but I've got two girl killings in the issue already and I'd rather have yours for balance."

"I'll get on it right away."

"Good. Look, did you get my letter?"

"Yes, just before."

"You think there's any art on Stavinski?"

"Should be enough for a good spread. I understand there's a couple of shots of busted safes, the tools and a standup picture of the mob. By the way, I'm going to send you a shot of McHugh. That's the cop who gave me the story. I'd appreciate it if you'd use it. You left out his picture the last time and he was a little sore and I promised I'd make it up to him."

"Check." Then I heard him spell out the name McHugh to himself, as if he were making a memorandum of it. He said, "When you send me the art, don't forget to include an affidavit on the prison sentences. We'll need that, of course. Oh, and one more thing. What name do you want to use on Stavinski? I'll probably have two by you in the same issue and I'd like to use different by-lines."

I selected one of my pen names at random. "Bert Waters'll do." I never used my own name for I didn't want to build my reputation on these stories.

"Right. Let me hear from you soon on Peterson, won't you?"

"The minute I find out."

Hanging up, I knocked the ashes from my pipe and filled it up immediately. Everything was going wrong. First Ginny and now this. I wanted to finish the short story I had been writing but knew that I could not delay Davenport. He was my bread and butter; he had to come first. I had no objection to the money I was making from him, no objection to writing these true detective

stories once in a while and at my leisure; but why was it so often when I wanted to do some fiction, a call or letter or telegram would come just in time to divert me?

It was almost two years now that I had been in this city, covering crime here and throughout the state on a free-lance basis for Davenport. Before that, living with my parents in New York, I had worked in the promotion department of Elliott Publications, a pulp house that put out a string of movie fan, comic and detective titles, including *Squadcar*. My writing background up to then had been journalism at New York University, where I had edited a literary magazine, public relations work in the army, and some poetry and fiction pieces in esoteric quarterlies that paid off in "prestige" and, more tangibly, in free copies. While working for Elliott, I had become friendly with Davenport, who had conceived *Squadcar* about twenty years earlier, and he had taken a warm interest in me. Most of his regular contributors could never have published a line in any other kind of magazine, and sometimes their stories were so bad, bad even for *Squadcar*, that Davenport would farm them out to me for rewriting.

I spent close on three years with the pulp house, meanwhile keeping up my outside writing, occasionally publishing fiction and never forgetting that some day I was going to quit my job and be a full-time author. And then one day Davenport told me that he had fired his writer in this city for the misdeed of doing the same case for five different fact books, and I leaped at the opportunity it offered: free-lancing for Davenport I would be able to support myself while I wrote the stories and novels that were within me. And yet it was not proving that simple. Time, time was passing and I had accomplished so very little. In the past couple of years just about all I had done was grow that much older. I would be thirty in a matter of months, an age I had once thought would see me close to my goal; sometimes, especially at night, it frightened me.

Dully now I picked up the Peterson murder story I had cut out and put on the bed. My impulse was to tear it into many pieces but I managed to read it through again; and somehow I grew calmer. Two, three days and I would be finished with it; then I would be free to write what I pleased.

Two, three days.

I forgot, as I always managed to forget, that the stories that had gone before had also been a matter of two, three days.

Pulling the Peterson case envelope from my files, I dumped

the other clippings I had collected on the desk. There were four altogether. The case had not had time to bloom, for Peterson's body had been found three days ago and his murderer had confessed about forty-eight hours after that. I had my doubts as to the story it would make.

The case had started off sensationally enough. A man had been walking his dog in a wooded section of the city when the dog, who had run off ahead of him, began barking furiously. Hurrying toward him, the man found his hound scratching at a mound of earth; then to the man's horror a leg slowly appeared. After the body was disinterred by the police, it was identified as that of James Peterson, a thirty-nine-year-old insurance agent, who left behind a widow and two small daughters. His widow and friends claimed that he hadn't an enemy in the world, yet someone had bludgeoned him and shot him twice in the chest. Because his wallet was missing, the motive seemed definitely to have been robbery.

The clipping dated after the one detailing the murder said simply that the police were working on definite evidence and that they hoped to crack the case soon; the one following that announced the arrest of Peter Crisponi, a forty-two-year-old former carnival worker and the story I just cut out that morning merely said that Crisponi had confessed to the crime and was being held without bail for the coroner.

I had my doubts about it as a story for Davenport mainly because the case had been solved too soon. It sounded open and shut, as if Crisponi had been arrested on a tip, which would just about kill it as a story for *Squadcar*. Davenport insisted on his stories being multi-faceted, with false suspects and misleading clues, and unless my hunch was wrong this was nothing as far as detective work went.

But maybe not. I dialled Police Headquarters and asked for Homicide. Lieutenant Thompson answered! I recognised his voice immediately. He was in charge of Homicide, and for reasons of my own I didn't want to talk to him or let him know I was calling. Muffling my voice, I asked for Detective Ferguson.

"He won't be in for a week," the answer came. "He's on vacation. Can anyone else help you?"

"No, this is a personal call." I hung up quickly, wondering what to do. Ferguson was my chief contact on the Homicide Squad. He always gave me what I wanted in exchange for a couple bottles of whisky or cash or a hat certificate or something

like that, but preferably cash. It was the policy of the Department never to give out a story until a case had been disposed of in court; but Ferguson was my means of getting around that. What the devil could I do now? Almost none of the magazines waited for a final disposition of an important case before publishing it, their biggest concern being to come out with it first. And I knew what would happen if I waited a week until Ferguson returned. I would not be able to make the deadline for this issue, and every other book would carry the story ahead of us. Most of the boys did not care about such fine details as talking to the police before writing a story. They would get a few newspaper clippings and build up a yarn without regard for facts; but my relationship with Davenport was on a different level from that. Not that I couldn't get away with a phoney story, but I didn't want to. Davenport wanted true stories, direct from police sources, which he insisted proudly was why *Squadcar* was among the leaders in the field. His claim was that he would rather not run a story at all than have it based on fiction. Davenport trusted me and my stories and I wanted it to remain that way—as much for my own sake as his: it was too easy to lose your integrity in this business, and I clutched mine tenaciously.

But that was not helping me now. Should I simply forget about the story? I didn't want to do it in the first place and yet I was afraid to let it drop. Despite everything, I needed Davenport and I knew that even though he liked me, he would not hesitate cutting me off if he thought I was careless or negligent. With him the magazine came first; sentiment followed.

Well, maybe I would call Davenport later and see what he suggested, although he didn't like excuses either. Then I remembered that I had to get pictures from Detective McHugh on the Stavinski story. I opened my wallet and took out two tens and a five and put them in an envelope and sealed it. On the face of the envelope I wrote "Det. M. McHugh". As I was putting on my trench coat, the phone rang.

"Paul?"

"Ginny, darling, how are you?"

"I'm fine, Paul. That's what I called for. It . . ." her voice grew soft, embarrassed—"it happened."

I closed my eyes in relief. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure, silly."

"Oh, honey, I'm so glad. When?"

"About fifteen minutes ago. I called you as soon as I could."

"Oh, darling, I told you not to worry. Didn't I tell you not to worry?"

"I couldn't help it. I'm such a baby."

"Don't," I laughed, "ever use that word."

"Paul, please. Don't joke with me."

"I'm sorry, honey. It's just that I'm so happy."

"Will I see you tonight?"

"Of course."

"What time?"

"About eight, okay?"

There was a pause. "Did you miss me this week-end, Paul?"

"More than you know," I said.

"Do you mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. You know I mean it."

"Paul, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for worrying you. But it was three weeks and that never happened to me before."

"Look, honey, no more. It's all over. . . . Look, I'll see you tonight."

"Is that all you're going to say?" She sounded disappointed.

"I don't understand——"

Hesitantly, "Paul, say something nice."

I gripped the phone tightly and brought it closer. "I love you, honey." It was the first time I had ever said that to her and I wasn't sure if I had meant to say it then. It had just come out of me, and suddenly it seemed right.

"Paul, darling." Her voice became a whisper. Undoubtedly there were people nearby. "I love you too. I love you so much, my darling."

"Tonight then."

"Tonight."

She kissed me and lowered the receiver so gently that for a short time I did not realise she was gone.

CHAPTER TWO

DETECTIVE HEADQUARTERS was on the second floor of the courthouse, at the end of a long, highly polished corridor. A railing divided the main room. This was the Complaint Room; several detectives and clerks were busy at their desks. Once in a while the police radio attached to the far wall would blare out something unintelligible to me. No one seemed to pay any attention to it.

I went through a side door and down a hall lined with offices. The third office had a sign SAFE SQUAD attached to the grey stippled wall. Its frosted glass door was open. Instinctively I felt for the envelope in my pocket. Then I took a step inside. Almost with the same movement I drew my foot back, just as if I had stepped on something hot.

McHugh and two other detectives were questioning a prisoner, a Negro of about twenty-five, who was sitting on a chair next to the room's only desk. His skin was extremely black, his hair mussed and standing up in front like corkscrews. He had a dull squat appearance and his eyes looked half asleep. There was a touch of sweat about him. A detective was sitting at the desk; another was standing with McHugh against the wall, facing the prisoner. There was something frightening about the entire scene which, with my entrance, had become frozen like an action captured on film.

And then McHugh smiled and waved. "C'mon in, junior." He was a short, slightly bow-legged man whose face beneath a mop of red, greying hair always was flushed. Whenever I saw him, he had a wad of chewing gum rolling in one cheek. He was in shirt sleeves and his arms were thick and freckled. He wore his pants low, the belt appearing to hold up his stomach. A huge revolver was thrust into his back pocket.

McHugh motioned for me to close the door behind me. I did and stood against it, to the prisoner's right. The detective behind the desk winked at me; his name was Eagen. The one leaning against the wall nodded, thought I didn't know him.

Detective McHugh said to the prisoner, "You know who this man is, boy?"

The prisoner blinked at me and looked away.

"He's from the F.B.I.," McHugh went on. "You heard of the F.B.I., haven't you, boy?"

"Nossuh."

"You never heard of the F.B.I.?" McHugh demanded, lapsing into dialect. "The Federal Bureau of Investigimitation?"

"Yessuh."

"Then what's the idea lyin' to me?" McHugh leaned over, pretending anger. Eagen smiled at me; I felt uneasy but found myself smiling back.

The prisoner's head seemed to be sinking into his shoulders.

"This man's from the government," McHugh said, "so you better start tellin' the truth. He came over here all the way from Washington. Washington, D.C. You're startin' up with the government now, boy, and that's ba-a-a-d. The government don't mess around."

The prisoner turned to me again, his yellowish eyes somewhat questioning. I felt a little sorry for him and yet as our eyes met I hardened my face, playing the role despite myself and somehow not disliking it.

"The government," said McHugh, "you know what they do, don't you? They got a special place down Georgia for guys like you." McHugh was doing this for my sake, I knew, and the other detectives would look at me occasionally to see if I was enjoying it. "They got a place right in the middle of the swamps, with mosquitoes this big, and hound dogs that like dark meat, and guys with slouch hats and long rifles and, man, I'm tellin' you they don't miss when they take a shot at you. They get prizes for each guy they shoot up. . . . You wouldn't like that now, would you?"

"Nossuh."

"Okay now," McHugh said, "I'm gonna give you another chance. You don't tell me the truth I'm lettin' this F.B.I. man take you. And, man, this F.B.I. man is mean." He shot me a look, sucked in his cheeks and tried not to smile. "Okay," he said, "where'd you get the forty-two bucks?"

The prisoner's head swayed. "Some fellow he give it to me."

"Oy gevalt," McHugh moaned. To the others, "We gotta hear his story again?" Back to the prisoner, "You so full of crap, man, it comes up to here." McHugh touched his ears. "Don't

you-all want to go to heaven? What you-all gonna say, man, when Saint Pete stops you at them gates and asks 'Lonny, Lonny, why didn't you-all tell those nice policemen the truth when they asked you where you-all got the money? Why didn't you 'fess up and tell 'em you broke into your boss's store one night and kicked the daylight out of his safe? But no, no, you had to lie and now I can't let you-all into these pearly gates.' What're you gonna say to him then?"

The man in the chair blinked thickly. Eagen swung his feet off the desk and stood up. He tilted his hat back from his forehead. He seemed a trifle bored but there was an unpleasantness in his eyes. The atmosphere was changing; you could feel it. The sarcastic good humour of a moment before was fading. These men were tiring of the sport. The prisoner sensed it.

"Why don't you tell us the truth?" Eagen said. He'd come around to the back of the prisoner's chair.

"I tol' you——" the prisoner started to say.

"What did you tell us?" McHugh asked. He was standing over the man, tapping a fist into his palm. "What'd you tell us, you son of a bitch? What'd you tell us, you no good son of a bi-~~ch~~ bastard?" His voice kept rising. "What'd you tell us, huh? A story I'm gonna shove right in your goddam throat any second, you hear? You hear me now? Now no more of your goddam lies, hear, you hear?" He was bellowing out each word. I had never seen a person so infuriated. My heart was pounding. *Tell the truth! For God's sake tell them what they want to know!* McHugh ran a wrist across his lips. He said tightly, "I'm waitin'."

Sweat glistened on the neck of the man in the chair. I felt an agonising wrench of pity for him. Suddenly his head shot forward as Eagen hit him across the neck with his palm. The man winced, then managed to sit back again. He glowered at the floor and remained mute. McHugh motioned for me to follow him outside.

McHugh had been almost a raving maniac in the office, but here in the corridor it was as though nothing had happened. He appeared completely relaxed. He took my hand and shook it.

"You wanted to see me, junior?"

My insides were still churning but I managed to say, "Yes, on that Stavinski case. I wanted to tell you it sold."

"No kidding!" He was pleased. "Good boy."

"I . . . know you're busy now but . . . could I see you later?"

I've . . . got a little something for you and I'd also like to pick up the art on Stavinski."

"Sure thing." Once again he was the quiet, obliging man who always gave me stories. "I shouldn't be no more than fifteen, twenty minutes. Can you hang aound?"

"I guess."

"Shouldn't take us too much longer with that character. I think we've got him loosened up. See how you can't be nice to a guy?"

I forced a nod.

The door closed behind him. My gaze remained for a hypnotic moment upon the frosted glass. I couldn't help feeling sorry for that man in there and seeing him get slapped had angered me. But perhaps, I rationalised, they would not be brutal to him. They were only out to scare him, that was all. They had psychological means of making a man talk, and suddenly I wondered about the possibilities of an article dealing with confessions, an article with plenty of anecdotes to illustrate the various means of drawing out confessions. A shadow moved across the glass. A chill spiralled through me. Yet whatever happened, hadn't he brought it upon himself? Wasn't it all his own fault? He was obviously lying and being stubborn. The chill was replaced by a flood of security: it was a good feeling being on this side of that door. But would they beat him? . . . Hell, what was wrong with me? If I wanted to feel sorry for anyone why pour it out on a crook? There were too many innocents who deserved pity, people in hospitals, orphans, the destitute: they were free of guilt while this man had done wrong and deserved no sympathy. I walked away.

Homicide was two offices down the corridor. The door was open and as I passed I saw Lieutenant Thompson at his desk. I stopped and tried to think this thing out. Thompson had turned me down so many times before that it seemed useless to approach him now; but actually what did I have to lose? Detective Ferguson was away and there was no one else I knew who could help me on the Peterson case. Perhaps the Lieutenant would have a change of heart.

Never once had I seen Lieutenant Thompson smile. He was a tall squarely built man with a tight, expressionless face. His eyes were cold but very much alive: they appeared to miss little. He was brusque, efficient and dignified in a reserved and uncompromising way. He was polite but never to the point

of friendliness; soft-spoken, he always seemed to be thinking more than he said.

Thompson, I had learned, was not completely in the Commissioner's favour. He had been the head of the Homicide Squad for little more than two years. Before that he had been in charge of the Vice Squad, and it was by cracking down with too much enthusiasm upon the gambling fraternity that he had caused frowns and consternation in official quarters. The climax came when he physically threw out of his office the bookmaking friend of a certain politician; hearings and accusations followed; demands for his dismissal echoed. From what I heard, for I had not been living here then, the Commissioner would not have looked with displeasure upon his forced retirement, but the best he was able to do was ease Thompson into the Homicide Squad where he could do no further harm. I admired Thompson for this. And while I also admired him, although reluctantly, for the fact that he was one of the few officers I had met who did not care for publicity, who even avoided it, this particular trait of his made my work difficult and I had come to dislike him for it. I felt too that he held no great love for me either, that he thought of me as an intruder and a nuisance.

Lieutenant Thompson looked up from some papers as I entered his office.

"Can I take a few minutes of your time, Lieutenant?"

"Take a seat." He gestured me into the chair next to his desk.

"It's about this Peterson case, Lieutenant," I began uneasily. "I was just wondering if it would be possible for me to get the story."

"The story," he repeated. He seemed faintly amused.

"You know the sort of thing I want," I said.

"Oh, I know very well." He leaned back. "Crisponi hasn't been convicted yet, you know."

"Yes, I know that."

"He hasn't appeared before the coroner. He hasn't been indicted. He hasn't been anything. And you want the story." Shaking his head, "You fellows."

"I . . . just thought I'd ask."

"Tell me—" his fingertips made a little tent close to his chin—"tell me, how do you know Crisponi's guilty?"

I shrugged. "Isn't he?"

"I don't know," he answered simply. "I think he is. My men think he is. All the evidence says he is. But tell me . . . you tell me. Is he guilty?"

"If you think he's guilty," I smiled, "that's good enough for me."

My attempt at smoothing him had no apparent effect. "Look," he said, coming forward again, "what I think, what my men think, doesn't mean a judge and a jury are going to think the same way. Crisponi's not actually guilty by law until they say he is. Who are you and I to pass sentence on him? That's what courts are for. Remember that."

"My story won't say he's guilty, Lieutenant."

"By implication it will. I've read enough of those stories to know."

"All I want," I said, trying to put into my voice the earnestness I felt, "is the story of the police investigation leading up to his arrest. I don't want anything more than that."

"I wouldn't do that now for all the money in the world." He picked up a pencil, tapped the end against the desk's glass top. "Do you know what happens to me if the D.A. ever learned I gave out that story now? He'd chew out my tail from one end of the courthouse to the other. And he'd have every damn right. What right would I have to give you evidence that might sway a jury unfairly? What right do you and I have to prejudge a man when his life's at stake? Tell me, would you want that to happen to you?"

"If I ever beat a man's brains out, Lieutenant," I said dryly, "if I ever shot a man and beat his brains out and then dug a hole and buried him, I guess I'd have a lot of gall expecting too much."

"Let's put it this way," Thompson said. "When Crisponi goes on trial, I'm going to bring out every shred of evidence my men and I have been able to dig up against him. But after I'm through, someone else is going to weigh that evidence and then pass sentence. As far as I'm concerned, that man deserves the chair. But that's just my opinion." He shrugged. "For all I know he may be found innocent."

"How could he be innocent? He's confessed, hasn't he?"

"He still is going to have a trial."

"You know," I said after a moment, trying a different approach, "no matter what *Squadcar* does, other magazines are going to publish this story before trial."

"It won't be any of my doing."

"You know what those magazines will do, don't you? They won't bother to come to you for the truth. They'll dig up a few clippings and then weave a story around them."

"I can't stop them. That's their conscience, not mine. My hands will be clean."

I realised it was hopeless but went on. "What I want are the true, honest facts. I want to give each officer who worked on the case credit for what he did."

"I appreciate what you're trying to do." I could not be sure if he was being sarcastic. "But I'm sorry."

"What if I show you the manuscript after I finish it? If you don't like it, I'll tear it up right in front of your eyes. I promise you that."

"Look, I trust you," he said. "It's not that at all. Don't you see, don't you understand what I'm driving at? Let's say I give you the facts and you write your story. What'll you have? You'll have the story of a crime, you'll have the story of the investigation and the arrest. And you'll have the murderer. No matter how many times you use the word . . . what is it, 'alleged'? . . . or 'the police say'? . . . no matter how you phrase it, in the eyes of the reader, in the eyes of the potential jurors, that man is the murderer." Thompson shook his head. "And, brother, I don't want that. I've got enough of a responsibility. When a man stands a chance of going to the chair on my evidence, that man's going to have a fair trial."

"Lieutenant, do you really think my story will affect the trial? Seriously now. Potential jurors read newspapers as well as these magazines. And then like I said, no matter if I write this up or not, other magazines will be out with it just the same."

"It still didn't come from me."

"Just let me ask you one more thing. This Peterson case isn't one of those borderline things, is it? Crisponi's confessed, he——"

"He can retract the confession," Thompson interrupted. "It may be disallowed for some other reason."

"But you've got other evidence, I'm sure."

"His lawyer may get around it. You never know. And other factors may come out at the trial that may have a bearing on the verdict. Your story may be true as we see it now but we may see it with different eyes from the judge or jury. Look, I'm very sorry," he said abruptly, "I've got a responsibility to

that man and to myself and I can promise you I'm not going to compromise it."

I stood up, realising I had gone rather far with him. Not wanting to make an enemy of the man, I said, "Do you think I'll be able to get the story after the trial?"

He nodded. "If there's a conviction and it doesn't go to a higher court, you come in and we'll see what we can do." An expression approaching good humour but not quite attaining it, crossed his face. "I won't write the story myself, I guarantee you that."

We shook hands. I said good-bye but he was reading again and did not answer. The hell with you, I thought.

The door to the Safe office was still closed and I went out to a corner drugstore for a cup of coffee. I thumbed through a copy of *Squadcar* on the rack. One of my stories led the issue.

HER LAST RHUMBA—TO THE TUNE OF HOT LEAD

Was the Answer to This Lovely
Brunette's Murder Her Paramour's
Secret? Police Thought So Until—

By BOB SIMONS

I skimmed the pages. Rarely did I ever actually read one of these stories after publication; I was just checking out of curiosity. The title and blurb were printed over a large photo of the victim, sprawled semi-nude across her bed. Next to libel suits, Davenport's greatest fear was the possible banning of the magazine by postal and church officials; but an opposing pressure was what he called "keeping a hop, skip and a jump ahead of the competition" and so occasionally he would run such a picture (caption: "Can you find the all-important clue which police detected in this room?") and keep his fingers crossed. I closed the magazine and put it back on the rack.

The druggist lighted a cigar. "We sell 'em also."

Returning to Headquarters I found Detective McHugh in the corridor outside his office.

He took me inside. No one was there. The empty chair next

to the desk gave me a strange feeling. It was like looking at a dead man's clothes.

"How'd you make out?" I questioned McHugh.

"When?" He had already forgotten.

"You know, with that fellow." It still amazed me, the contrast, the anger of before and then this.

"Oh. Oh, the bum went for it." And that was that: McHugh sat on a corner of the desk, chewing slowly. "That's all you get today," he said regretfully. "You get a bunch of bums. We used to get some beautiful thieves in the old days. Honest to God, I mean some of them were really beautiful."

I took out the envelope. "Here's a little something for you." I had grown not to be awkward about this sort of thing.

"Oh?" He sounded surprised, although he wasn't. "Thanks a lot." He folded the envelope without opening it and stuck it in his pocket.

"I certainly appreciate what you've done for me, Mr. McHugh. That's just my way of showing it. . . . Incidentally, can I get the art on Stavinski?"

"Sure can." He went to the files, pulled open a drawer and from a file removed some pictures. One was of Stavinski and his two buddies, Caldwell and Rivers, in a police line-up. They were posed against a white wall with black lines running across it. They wore street clothes and two of them held hats by their sides. And then there were single shots of each of them, front view and profile, with the front view having numbers on a placard across their chests. There was a picture of a safe, the lock battered from its open door. Another picture was of the tools—rolls of black tape, two pairs of gloves, a couple of punches, a sledge hammer, a drill, a hacksaw and a roll of wire.

"These are fine," I said. "Now all I need is a picture of you."

"You know they forgot me the last time," he reminded me. Then he tapped me lightly on the arm to indicate it meant nothing to him; I knew better.

"They won't this time," I promised.

"Let's see." He pulled at his chin, then snapped his fingers. "Got it." He went to the files again. This time he came back with a picture of the Police Commissioner shaking hands with a detective while McHugh and another officer looked on. "This was in the newspaper and I got a copy. It's when I got the commendation for this case. You put the commendation in, didn't you?"

"Sure enough."

"How about the Commissioner? You didn't leave him out, did you?"

"I'd never leave the Commissioner out."

"How about these guys?" He meant the other officers in the photo. They were detectives from one of the districts into which the city was divided. Headquarters detectives and men from the district in which an important crime took place almost always worked hand in hand. I sensed jealousy here.

"I mentioned their names. Had to do that. But they didn't get much play."

"They almost screwed up the whole case," he said.

McHugh said then that he would have to have these pictures back and I told him I would have copies made of them. The originals would be returned in a few days.

"What I've got to do now," I said, "is verify the prison sentences. You know the procedure. I've got to make out an affidavit that I looked at the records and that I saw the sentences with my own eyes. It's not that I don't take your word but my editor's got ulcers worrying about libel suits."

"Look, anything you want, I told you that."

He led me into the record room. He called a clerk over and gave him the names of the criminals. The cards came back. I had to verify not only the prison sentences but the fact that Stavinski had a previous record and that prior to this arrest, he had escaped from an out-of-state penitentiary: details I had included in my story and which caused Davenport concern. I noticed immediately that the sentences on the records were five and ten years less than the ones McHugh had given me at the time I got the story.

"Goddam," he exploded angrily, "how do you like that!" He pointed to erasure marks on the cards. "These bums got the sentences I gave you, all right. But you know what happened after that? The judge gives 'em stiff terms in court, it gets a big play in the papers and then later he cuts it down. Lots of these so-called tough judges do that. And don't think the cons don't know it. Aaah!" He waved in disgust. I copied the new sentences. McHugh walked out with me to the main room.

"Don't make yourself scarce, junior. Come around. Meanwhile I'll dig into the files and see if I can come up with anything good. You don't mind old cases, do you?"

• “If they’ve got the stuff, I don’t. You know the sort of thing I want.”

• “Right.” He made a circle with two fingers. As I walked away, he called after me, “Hey, junior, don’t forget to bring over a few copies of the magazine.”

Back in my room, I tried to decide what to do next. I had to get the Stavinski pictures copied and mailed away and I had to type up the affidavit and have it notarised. But all that could wait. I thought about the fiction piece in my desk and how I would like to finish it; but the Peterson-Crisponi case worried me. I hated to let Davenport down; and also I could use the money. But even more important at the moment was that Lieutenant Thompson had annoyed me so thoroughly that getting the story had become a means of thumbing my nose at him. His smug self-righteousness irritated me, especially since I felt that his conscience had nothing to do with his turning me down, that he was simply a man who would rather say no than yes. That he should ascribe pettiness to conscience was more than I was willing to take. Detective Ferguson. Everything depended on Ferguson. He would have to be on vacation this week! And then I thought of the obvious. It could be, after all, that he was home. A vacation to him might mean a week at home.

• I dialled his number. A child answered.

“Hello, is Detective Ferguson there?”

“Who?”

“Your daddy.” I was guessing. I had no idea if Ferguson had children. “Is your daddy home?”

“Wait a minute.” And then to my relief I heard the cry, “Daddy, someone wants to talk to you.”

“Hello?” It was Ferguson’s familiar gravelly voice.

“Hello, Ed? This is Weiler. Paul Weiler.”

“How you doing there, kid. What’s up?”

“Am I glad to talk to you! I heard you were on vacation and I was afraid you were away.”

Ferguson laughed. “I’m a murder boy, remember? If I was on the Vice Squad I could afford vacations.”

“Ed, I need your help.”

“Shoot.”

“It’s this Peterson-Crisponi case. My editor’s yelling for it and I’ve got to have it in by the end of this week.” I purposely shortened the deadline. “Did you do anything on it?”

"I'm low man on the totem pole in that office, you forget? They only give me jig cases and abortions." He laughed again, a little bitterly. "But they do talk about the good cases while I'm around, so I can't help hearing. I know a little about it, kid."

"Think you can help me?"

"No reason why not."

"Swell. How about sometime tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow morning? About ten?"

"Ten would be perfect."

"It can't be in the office, you know. I'll be up at your place."

"Fine. I certainly appreciate this, Ed. You know I'll take care of you."

"Forget it." Just try though. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Hanging up, I leaned back and stretched happily. Another of life's crises had passed. Two, in fact. First Ginny and then this, all within a few hours. And Ginny loved me, she said she loved me. Damn it all, it was good to be alive!

CHAPTER. THREE

THE Gordons lived in one of the fashionable suburbs of the city, in a large stone and brick home that would have been pretentious almost anywhere but in that neighbourhood, where it was like a ten-carat diamond dimmed by the glitter of twenty-carat clusters. Ginny's mother often spoke about moving, as if that fourteen-room house were not adequate for the three of them, and despite the fact that they had built it only about twelve years ago, which was the approximate vintage of their prosperity.

Maxwell Gordon owned a moderate size department store which, from the increasing amount of newspaper space devoted to its advertising, was growing constantly. From what I had heard, the process of expansion had begun when Mrs. Gordon had first taken an active interest in the business, and from my own observations of the family set-up I could believe it.

Mrs. Gordon was an aggressive, ambitious, highly-strung woman, attractive in a severe way. Her black hair was pulled back tightly from a centre parting and mushroomed into a bun at her neck. She was always well groomed. Though her lips smiled easily her eyes never shared it. Sometimes I wondered how she had permitted herself to conceive children and if it had been done in pain. Ginny had told me once that her mother had been an orphan and that for many years life had been a struggle for her: it had not surprised me. It explained the broad "a" she affected and occasionally forgot, her manner, gushing and exuberant, in the presence of even more social and wealthy acquaintances. I felt also that she did not like me, a fact I am sure she would have protested with enough vigour to convince even herself.

Her husband, on the other hand, was a slender greying soft-spoken man, some ten years her senior. He seemed indifferent rather than meek. I had never heard him raise his voice and he appeared to look on this household of two women with baffled amusement. He had completely accepted domination by his wife; perhaps he liked it or perhaps he did not feel it worth his

struggle. He was well-read and from him undoubtedly had come Ginny's love of music, art and literature, her desire to know many things. He was always deeply immersed in a book and in my few conversations with him he had expressed interest in my writing. Whenever I saw him he was holding an unlighted cigar or rolling one in his lips. Perhaps, before his marriage, he used to smoke.

Ginny was an only child. Since her mother was a business woman, she had been raised by a procession of maids; she had been sent to the "best" schools, including an exclusive girls' college; her less formal education had run the gamut of art, ballet, elocution, piano and archery. Although the Gordons were not Society, they came close and the trip they had made to Nassau had been mentioned in the columns. One day, if all went according to schedule and Ginny became a gracious and well-married lady, her children would be Society.

But somewhere along the way Ginny had begun to balk. It was a revolution of the spirit. In college she had led an organisation which, even if only slightly left of centre, had been condemned and ultimately abolished. Majoring in sociology was not shocking in itself and could even be "social", but more than a few people were disturbed that she was serious about it, serious to the point of becoming a "visitor" for the Department of Public Assistance. Her enthusiasm for causes, people and inanimate objects was not an affectation. It boiled from within. And having seen so many of my own enthusiasms wear thin, hers stimulated me once again and I loved her for it.

I arrived at the house promptly at eight. The maid took my hat and coat. Mr. and Mrs. Gordon were in the living-room. Mrs. Gordon was watching television. Her husband was reading a book and flicking imaginary ash from his cigar.

"Oh hello, Paul," Mrs. Gordon greeted.

"Paul," Mr. Gordon said. He put aside his cigar, closed the book on one finger, half stood and shook hands. They were on the sofa and I took the chair across from them.

"Virginia will be down in a minute," Mrs. Gordon said. "Is it still raining?"

"Slightly. I think it's going to stop soon."

"You will be careful driving, won't you, Paul, darling?" She smiled indulgently. "I know I don't have to tell you, but you read about accidents all the time—and, well, you know."

"You don't have to worry, Mrs. Gordon."

"Oh, I know that. But just the same. You know how mothers are." After a moment, "Paul, will you do something for me? Will you see Virginia eats something before you leave the house? She had absolutely no supper. Maybe you can do something with her, I can't."

"She didn't do too badly," Mr. Gordon spoke up.

"Paul, you listen to me."

Mr. Gordon opened his book and began reading.

"She comes home late and she's so exhausted," Mrs. Gordon said, "and then she doesn't eat anything. I'm really worried about her. I wish I could make her give up that job."

"She seems to love the work."

"If you ask me it's just that she's too proud to give it up. You know once Virginia starts something . . . She's like me that way. But it's terrible." She shook her head vigorously. "The atmosphere she's in all day, no wonder she can't eat. She doesn't tell me but I know she's with the coloured most of the time. Nigger is a horrible word but somehow it just seems to fit. Ginny dies every time I use it. But you know how most of them live." Her face looked pained, then lost it. "It isn't the salary I object to, although Lord knows the city doesn't pay anything. A college graduate too. It's too bad I didn't know what sociology implied. Never, never would I have let her . . ." She offered me candy from the dish on the cocktail table and insisted that I take a piece. I picked something that turned out to be a fig. I chewed it unhappily.

"Do you go back to New York often?"

"Once in a while. I haven't been there lately, though."

"Your mother must miss you. I know how it was when Ginny was at school."

"I guess she's used to it by now. I have a younger sister, you know, so I imagine things aren't too dull at home."

"Even so," she smiled maternally. "Your father's a doctor, isn't he? I think that's what you said."

I nodded.

"A specialist?"

"No, he has a general practice. He——" I stood up as Ginny came into the room. A warmth went through me. It was as if I had not seen her for years or had forgotten how strikingly pretty she was. There was something compelling and different about Ginny. Her hair was glossy black and cut short the way I liked it, with a careless straggle of bangs. It was almost a skullcap.

Beneath long lashes her eyes were wide and alert and dark-pupiled; they demanded attention immediately. She had an oval face with high cheekbones and full lips that were always somewhat parted as if asking a question. Her nose had a slight tilt to it. She looked sophisticated until she smiled and then her nose wrinkled and her cheeks creased. I had always thought her taller than five-three, and once on a dance floor I insisted she was at least five-five and she kicked off one shoe and sank down to shoulder level and laughingly asked if I were convinced or would she have to take off the other.

"Paul," Mrs. Gordon was saying, "tell her."

Ginny knew immediately what her mother meant. "I'm not hungry, Mother, can't you believe me?"

"You've got to have something. A glass of milk, anything."

Ginny closed her eyes and sighed. "If it will make you happy."

Mrs. Gordon looked triumphant. Later, when Ginny took her fur coat from the closet, her mother said, "In this weather? You're going to wear that coat in the rain?"

"It's not raining that hard. Anyway this coat's been out in worse weather."

"You wear your cloth coat," She eased it with, "Do Mother a favour."

Ginny was about to object, then changed her mind. She pulled the other coat from the closet and put it on with quick angry motions.

"You've got to be sensible, dear," Mrs. Gordon said. She walked us to the door.

"Good night," I called to Mr. Gordon. He was still in his chair. He waved and then he went back to his book.

"You *will* bring her in early, won't you, Paul?" Mrs. Gordon asked. "She does have to get up so horribly early."

"I will, Mrs. Gordon."

"Have a good time you children." As I opened the door, she touched my shoulder and smiled. "I know I don't have to tell you again, but do drive carefully."

She was standing in the doorway, silhouetted in the light, even after Ginny and I were in the car. Almost reluctantly she closed the door. Ginny gave a little sigh and then with one movement we were in each other's arms. She clung to me almost in desperation. She began crying and I drew her to me even tighter. What had I done to her? That night on the sofa . . . I should have died first! My beautiful little darling! I loved to

hear her laugh. She had such a pretty laugh. And I loved the way she talked, excitedly and with gestures, even about painters, dead painters, or a sunset she had wished I shared: things that became important to me because of their importance to her. And had I changed her? She wept for a minute hysterically, against my shoulder, her body trembling. I could do nothing but let her cry herself out. Then she pulled herself away and took a tissue from her pocket-book and dried her eyes. She gasped chokingly with quick tearless sobs, as a child might, and soon even this was done.

"I'm sorry, Paul," she said. She was looking out of her window. I took her hand and turned her around. She came toward me and I was holding her again.

"What's the matter, honey?"

"Nothing, Paul. I'm better now. I was just being silly, feeling sorry for myself."

"Are you still worried? Is that it?"

"No, that's over. I told you. There's nothing to worry about." She sat back. "I don't know. Probably it's a part of it. It isn't easy to forget those three weeks. And then it's my mother. She sometimes aggravates me so. Sometimes I think my head's going to explode." She was looking out of her window once more. "Paul, what you said, about loving me . . . I'm sorry, I-I didn't mean to make you say that."

"You didn't make me say anything, Ginny."

She nodded at her reflection in the glass. "Yes I did. You knew what I wanted you to say."

"I do love you, Ginny." I wanted to keep saying it. It had been hard for me to say once but now I wanted to repeat it over and over.

". . . Why did you let me go away this week-end?"

"Didn't you say you wanted to be with your girl friend?" I frowned. "You said you hadn't seen her since college."

"Oh, you!" She grimaced and then put her arms around me and kissed me on the mouth. "Didn't you know I just wanted you to tell me not to go?"

"I'm not always too clever. Sometimes you have to spell things out for me."

"Do you know something?" She put her head on my chest. "Even though I was afraid, even though I was ashamed and worried, sometimes at night I actually hoped there would be a baby. It was like a comfort to me because I knew that that

way you'd be mine. And then when it happened today, I was happy but then I thought that now you could be through with me. It scared me. That's why I wanted you to say something to me. And then when you did and I hung up I thought maybe I'd made you do it. I'm silly, aren't I, darling?"

"... No." I kissed her on her lips, her nose, each quivering eyelid.

She straightened. "Mama's gonna come a-shootin'."

"Let's have a cigarette."

I took out the pack and offered it to her. She reached for one, then drew her hand away. She peered toward the house. "Let's drive away first."

I started the motor. What she said disturbed me. In a way it had permitted another presence in the car. I drove around the block and she pushed in the lighter on the dash-board and when it popped out she lighted my cigarette and hers.

"When are you going to get over it?" I said. "You are twenty-one, you know."

"It's not a matter of age," she answered sombrely. "I don't like to aggravate her unnecessarily. You know there's a lot I do she doesn't approve of—my work, the way I think, things like that. But they're important to me and I don't care. But little things, I just don't want to start up. If she wants to buy me a certain dress and I know I don't need or want a dress, let her. If she wants me to drink milk and I don't feel like arguing, I drink milk. If she doesn't want me to smoke . . . I guess it's hard for you to understand, isn't it?"

"It just seems to me that what you call unimportant can actually be very important."

"You're right. Don't think I don't know that. But it's been a long pull for me, Paul. You can't realise. I've made long strides. You don't know how it was before. But I can't do everything at once. So I'm just willing to let these other things ride."

"Why don't you move out?"

"That's easily said."

"It can be done, you know."

Annoyance, perhaps at herself, crept into her voice. "I'm not saying it can't be done. I'm just saying I can't do it. I've thought about it . . . I can't."

"What do you want to do, marry out of it?"

"That wasn't very nice," she said evenly.

"I didn't mean it the way it sounded." And yet I had.

• She grew quiet for a moment. I drove on aimlessly. The windshield wipers worked monotonously. Everything but two arcs on the windows was covered with dark slithering raindrops.

"That's one thing I don't want to do," she said. "I've had chances and I never took them. If anything will keep me from getting married it's the fear I'm doing it only to escape."

"I'm sorry, Ginny." What right did I have to lecture her? Physical change did not necessarily mean escape; I should know that.

"Now you're the one who looks unhappy," she said.

"The trouble with us, we think too much. No more thinking the rest of the night, okay?"

"Okay," she smiled. "No more thinking."

"Where do you feel like going?"

"Anywhere. It's not important. Just as long as I'm with you."

"How about Giambro's?"

"Perfect."

Giambro's was a wine cellar located toward the centre of town. To enter it you had to go down a flight of steps, under a bright red awning and then through an equally red door with large golden hinges on it. The main room had a bar on one side but leading off it were several Gothic-arched alcoves, each large enough for a party of four. The tables had red checkered cloths and on each table was a coloured wax-gnarled candle that twisted out of a wine bottle. The walls were lined with photographs, some old and faded, of operatic and concert personalities of the past three decades; each bore a personal inscription to Giambro, whose claim was that he had the largest individual record collection in the country.

There were only two people at the bar and one other couple at a table. A record was playing. The girl in charge of the cloak-room and record player put down her cigarette at our entrance. Giambro, whom we knew well, greeted us brightly. He was a man in his seventies with a face like that of a newborn baby who resembles an old man. He was ugly in a good way: Giambro, one thought, would have been grotesque if he had been handsome. Emotion gushed from him in torrents of pleasure or displeasure. His temperament was his trade-mark and he used it like a baton. I envied him that this place was both his livelihood and his love; many people considered him eccentric.

We sat in one of the side rooms and ordered Chianti and Ginny asked for "*Che gelida manina*" from *Bohème*, which was

our favourite. She seemed happy enough for a while; but later her eyes became brooding.

"You're thinking again," I said. • •

Fingering her glass, "Paul . . . how many girls have you slept with?"

It sounded funny. "Hundreds, I guess."

"I'm being serious."

"What do you want me to say, Ginny?"

". . . Some of those girls, what did you think of them? Didn't you think they were tramps?"

I shrugged, confused.

"Then why aren't I a tramp?"

"Ginny, how can you say something like that?"

"Tell me. I want to know."

"I love you and you love me. What we did was because we loved each other. It wasn't anything we planned deliberately. It happened, that's all. It wasn't dirty, it——"

"Paul," she interrupted, then hesitated. "That night, after you left, I got sick. I ran to the bathroom and I threw up all over. Mother came in. She wanted to know what was wrong and I said I'd ate oysters or something which hadn't agreed with me. But I'm sure she knew."

"You were just imagining." I knew that nothing I could say would be right.

"When I was in college I heard that something happened to a girl right after that, that you could always tell when she'd done wrong."

"Those stories," I said irritably.

"I couldn't face her for days. I couldn't look at Daddy. I used to think—if you only knew the truth about your sweet innocent daughter. I felt so cheap. I—I can't help it, darling, but sometimes I still do."

"I could defend what happened but I won't. All I can say is that I'm sorry, honestly sorry, that it was all my fault."

She shook her head. "It was my fault. I could have stopped you."

"You didn't want to."

"Not for the reason you think. Suddenly I didn't want to stop you because I wanted to prove something to myself. I don't know what exactly. Maybe that I was mature, that I was worldly enough for you."

I lighted another cigarette. "I didn't realise you were so logical about the whole thing. At least I wasn't guilty of that."

• "I'm the only one who's guilty of anything."

"Must you always misunderstand everything I say?"

"Paul, tell me one thing. Before this happened, why didn't you ever tell me you loved me? . . . Didn't you?"

I took a drink, put the glass down firmly. When I looked up, her eyes were moist and begging for an answer.

"Listen to me, Ginny. I don't know if what I'm going to say will make sense to you but I'm going to try. I need love. There's no one in this world who needs love more. I've been out with a lot of girls in my time but the few I could love and who loved me, there was always something wrong. There's something I want out of life and they didn't fit into the picture. Maybe I'm wrong. I don't know why I'm so careful but it's just the way I am. This thing I want, maybe I'm in for a great disappointment, but I've got to . . . try. Ginny . . . I've loved you all along. I loved being with you. We've had fun together. You stimulate me. But I . . . was afraid, I imagine. Even to say it. Then this thing, this thing we did, it just untied all the knots inside me. It made me want to say I love you. I had to say it. I couldn't keep it within me any longer. If I've hurt you, I'm sorry. If I've ruined things, I'm sorry also."

"Nothing's been ruined, Paul. I was just telling you—" She paused. "You said about . . . wanting something. What is it?"

"Oh . . . it centres about my work mostly but I . . . just don't feel like going into it at the minute."

"All right, darling." She covered my hand with hers. "You know something, Paul? I love you so much every part of me feels it. What you said, it's made me so happy. I understand you more than you realise, at least I think I do. You know something else? I don't think I've ever respected anyone more. It's something I've felt all along. I respect you and I feel proud of you."

"You mean because I write? That seems to hold a fascination for some people—"

"No, no, it isn't only that, although it's a part of it, of course. I'm a frustrated writer, you know. I've written some pretty horrible poetry. But then again I'm a frustrated painter, musician, ballerina and singer. I've got a dozen little talents that have me running in every direction. But it's a part of it, the way you've channelled yours, the things you've done. And you have done well. . . . Now what's that look for? You *have*! For your age—"

"Uh huh." I was rolling the glass in my palm now.

"—for your age you've done remarkably. I'm proud of you for that. But I know I'd be proud of you, no matter what you did. I think anything you wanted to do you could do well. Look," she smiled, "can I help it if I like the guy?"

I help up my glass. "You've just about touched yours."

"Oh, I have, have I?" She took a deep swallow and closed her eyes as it went down.

"Let's get good and high tonight."

"Can you get high on this?"

"Nooo." I filled up her glass.

"I don't know if I liked that no." She took another sip and reached for a cigarette. She turned slightly. "Our record. I thought Giambro forgot."

We listened silently until it was done.

"You know what?" she said afterwards. "I love you. Why do I love you so much?"

"It's simple," I shrugged. "You just happen to have very good taste."

"It's not that you're so handsome. Let's see. You've got very nice eyes. They're blue now though sometimes they're green. I like blue better. Your nose, a little long——"

"It's very good for breathing."

"—but not too long. No, it's not a bad nose at all. It's a real masculine nose. Smile . . . not that way, silly. Nice teeth. You should smile more. Your cheeks give you that hungry look, you know. It's the only part of you that's authorish. And beautiful hair. Beautiful wavy hair. Paul, don't ever become bald. You'll look horrible. . . . Why didn't you bring your pipe tonight? I like you with a pipe."

"Should I tell you something about the pipe? Personally I can't stand it but the author's union insists. Don't tell anyone but actually it gets me nauseated."

"I think I am getting high. This is my third glass."

"Your second and a half. No cheating."

"How does it feel when you're high? I made believe once and I did a lot of crazy things but then everyone told me later they knew I hadn't been and I felt foolish."

"Do you feel like kissing me?"

"Yup."

"Well, lean over."

"Here?"

"You're not high," I said.

"Oh, did I tell you I got two new cases? I'm carrying a case load of close to eighty now."

"That's an awful lot."

"But I love it. I feel like I'm doing something worth-while. Of course it's frustrating in a way. Some of those people need assistance terribly but if they aren't absolutely penniless they can't receive it. That's the worst part, wanting to help someone and not being able to. The city practically makes them crawl first. Sometimes I get so angry. I'm the joke of the office, you know. They tell me I take things too personally."

"Well, you have to be disinterested in a way, don't you? It's like a surgeon. If he weren't cold——"

She shook her head quickly. "I don't ever want to be that way. If I ever find myself looking on those people as merely cases, then I'll quit. Actually you're not supposed to do anything beyond your job. You're just supposed to keep check on them until they're off assistance. You're not supposed to help them plan a budget or argue with a landlord who wants to evict them or wipe a little boy's running nose. I cheat."

"You're just a little do-gooder."

"Paul," she said seriously, "don't say that."

"I'm only teasing you, honey."

"Even so. Animals in a zoo live better than some of those people. Paul, I wish you would come with me some day. You could fill a library. There are so many things to write about, I envy you. I only wish I had the ability to put into words some of what I see every day. It wouldn't only be sordid or grotesque or angry but you find a lot that's beautiful and dignified in those people, Paul. They aren't all beggars or lazy. People get me angry who—but there I go thinking again, and we promised. Do you know I'm painting again? I painted Mother."

"What colour?"

"Very funny." She laughed although she didn't want to. "I did it in tempera and it's not very good but Mother thinks it's wonderful and wants to frame it. But she likes to frame everything I do."

"... Tell me, Ginny," I said uneasily, "what does your mother think of me?"

For a moment she did not seem to want to answer. My question had changed the mood. Then quietly, "I don't know." We spoke of other things.

That night, parked in front of her house, I asked Ginny, if she would marry me.

"Oh, darling!" She pressed her face against mine.

"Let's do it right away. Ginny, let's elope."

She drew back and her face clouded slightly. "I . . . I couldn't do it that way, Paul."

"Why?"

"I just couldn't. You ought to know. I couldn't do that to my parents."

"Then I don't think it'll ever be. I'm not the solid substantial citizen your mother wants and you know——"

"Paul, listen to me. I love you and I want to marry you but . . . let's not do it like that. Everything's going to work out. I know it will. But you just can't run away from things."

"Don't tell me that," I said brusquely. "I don't want to hear it."

"Why?" she frowned.

"Because sometimes I think that myself and I don't want to believe it. I have to believe that you can escape things, that you can run away, that you can flee into happiness."

"But everything is going to be all right. I just know it. It's going to be all right because . . . it *has* to be. We'll make it come out right. Now put your arms around me again, Paul. Please . . . don't be angry at me. That's it . . . hold me just like that, darling. Just like that. Hold me . . . hold me nice and . . . tell me you love me again."

CHAPTER FOUR

TO DETECTIVE FERGUSON the police laboratory was an obscenity: there was nothing its test tubes and microscopes accomplished that a good stool-pigeon could not do quicker and better. He distrusted scientific detection for it attacked his beliefs; he feared it for it lessened his importance. Lieutenant Thompson, although only a few years younger, was of the newer school. In his eyes Ferguson's kind of cop, although still needed at a certain level, was becoming the cavalryman in a world of tanks, the pony express rider racing the locomotive. Ferguson had been up for sergeant at the time Thompson took over the squad. Bitter, he was waiting still.

Ferguson was two-fisted, rough, profane and completely likeable. His dislike of the Lieutenant had made him garrulous with me, and therefore invaluable. He was in his fifties but did not look it. His brown hair, although thinning, was without a trace of grey. He had come up from the motor-cycles and looked like he could still handle one. Ferguson was a big man: over six feet two with mammoth shoulders and a chest like a beer keg. His face was round, with small eyes and flat wide nostrils and a tiny mouth. His ears protruded slightly and he had a thick neck that was scarred from boils. He always wore his hat on the back of his head, brim turned up, and a coloured tieless sports shirt under his suit jacket. A small star sapphire on the puffy little finger of his left hand was his only ostentation; the finger next to it had been shot off at the second joint.

Ferguson's hatred of criminals was different from Detective McHugh's, who could turn his anger off and on at will. McHugh could admire the "beautiful thief"; there was no such thing to Ferguson. To him anyone outside the law was outside the human race. The only exception he made was for bookies—"They ain't criminals, they serve a purpose, you ain't gonna stop people from gambling"—and occasionally I had seen him in their company. Ferguson often complained about his need for money.

He was about an hour late for our appointment that morning.

"I took the kid to school," he explained, pulling off his coat. "I got such screwed up hours it ain't often I see him. He's growing up, he knows his dog better'n he knows the old man. Well, how've you been, kid?" and he stuck out a huge hand and shook mine warmly. I knew he liked me a lot, that he would do almost anything for me. It was a good feeling.

"I appreciate your coming over like this, Ed."

"What the hell's there to appreciate? I got lots of time, you need a story."

"Well, it's your vacation——"

"Yeah, the middle of the winter they give me. You know what they can do with it." He only mentioned Thompson's name when he had to; usually it was "they" or "him".

He took the chair next to my desk. I lifted the cover from my typewriter and inserted a piece of yellow paper. "You don't mind if I type while you talk, do you? It's faster than if I write it down longhand."

"You do whatever you want." He lighted a cigarette and looked around for an ashtray. I pushed one toward him. He liked to wet the tip of the cigarette with his lips and it soon became frayed and loose. He spat out pieces of tobacco. "I haven't looked at the records," he said. "I didn't want to go into Headquarters and pull 'em out, it might have balled things up. But I know most of the facts."

"You didn't do any work at all on it, did you?"

"Christ, I'm the guy that got the confession. But don't put that in," he added quickly. "Keep my name the hell out of it. I don't want no trouble. You know how they are . . . Lemme tell you something." He came closer. "I think I told you the story before. I don't exactly rate. I'm the coon specialist. Any case that's dark, I get. Not half dark, but all dark, the kind that don't make the papers. If that's the way they want it, okay, I still draw the same salary. But it still gets me sore, you know what I mean? You can't help getting sore. But one of these days, you mark my word, I'm gonna fall into a good case, and when I do I'm gonna show 'em. Just one good case, that's all I want . . . and then I'll show 'em, they won't be able to stop me." He leaned back, colour on his cheeks. "That's all off the record, though."

"You know me, Ed."

"If I didn't trust you I wouldn't tell you."

"But you did get the confession?"

- He grinned. "That's a real story. I'll tell you when I get up to it. Christ, it'll give you a laugh! But like I said—" he waved both hands—"keep it out. It ain't only he don't want to give me the credit, he don't like these stories being given out and it's liable to boom my arse. And it's the boys too. I wouldn't want 'em to know. They think you give out a story you make a million bucks. But this ain't helping you none. I guess the car's the place to start. It blew the whistle on the case."

The car, he said, was found abandoned in the neighbourhood of Vincent and Palmerton streets. Blood covered part of the front seat, the side away from the driver, and there was a bullet hole in the door, from which a thirty-two calibre slug was later extracted.

Ferguson paused to let me catch up. The way I took notes was to wait for him to express a complete thought and then begin typing.

"Who covered that part of the investigation?" I asked. The more names the better. It won you friends in the department.

"Manning from the Third District. What the hell's his first name? Phillip. Yeah. Al Palmetto worked on it from Homicide. See, the call first went into the district and when Manning saw the blood and the bullet hole he contacted Homicide."

The police, Ferguson continued, checked the licence number and learned that the owner was James Peterson of this city. They also found out that that same morning a Mrs. Peterson had reported her husband as missing. Immediately they went to her home where Mrs. Peterson told them that she hadn't seen her husband since he left home at eight forty-five the previous morning. She hadn't worried too much that first night because she knew he was out collecting debits and that he often came home late; and when she'd put the children to bed and had gone to sleep herself, it had been with the assumption that her husband would be home when his insurance collections for the day were completed. But the next morning, discovering that he had not been home all night, she contacted the police.

"There was no doubt the guy had been knocked off," Ferguson said. "It was just a matter of finding his body."

That same afternoon a young man named Carmel was out walking his dog through a wooded area near Vanderbilt and Crane streets.

"That's the Taberton Hollow section," Ferguson said. "You know it, don't you?"

I nodded, typing.

"Then you know it's a pretty lonely spot. At night it's as dark as hell."

I already knew from the papers the facts of the finding of the body, but I let Ferguson relate how the dog ran ahead of its master and, scratching at a mound of earth, dug up a leg.

"What was the condition of the body?" I asked.

"Christ, you shoulda seen it! I was in the morgue on another job when they brought it in. It was really something. The papers say he had two bullet holes in his chest. One was in his chest, okay, but the other was right over the testimonials."

I shivered a little.

"And you shoulda seen his head. He didn't have a face any more. It was like jelly. The guy wasn't satisfied just shooting him. He had to beat him into a pulp, and I mean a pulp. . . . You know a tyre iron was found at the scene, don't you? See, what happened is Crisponi shot him in the car, pulled him out, saw he was still alive, shot him again, went back for the tyre iron—" he was indicating directions with his thumb—"came back and really went to work on him."

"Crisponi must be crazy," I said tightly.

Ferguson sniffed. "Like I'm crazy. Like you're crazy. That bastard's saner'n both of us put together."

"Then what could it be?"

Ferguson tapped his chest. "It's either in you or it ain't. It's in you when you're born and it just waits for the right time to come out. These psychiatrists with their fancy stories, you can shove 'em all. I'd like to see one of their wives or children get it, you'd see they'd forget all about that temporary insanity crap. They'd be too busy yelling give 'im the chair. Kid, it's in the blood. That's all there is to it."

"You're not safe on the street then. You never know who you're walking next to."

"You can sure as hell say that again."

I looked at my notes and turned the roller for a new line. Ferguson settled back. Well, that evening, no more than five hours after the murder hit the papers, they got their break. A man, and Ferguson could not recall his name, came into Headquarters and told Lieutenant Thompson that he had just read about the murder and that he had information he was certain was important. He lived in a rooming house and he

had arrived home late on the night of the crime. As he had walked up the stoop to the front door, he'd met Crisponi coming in also. The front of Crisponi's coat had been covered with blood and Crisponi, his eyes wild, hurried on, muttering something about having had a nose-bleed.

"This fellow thought that was a lot of blood from a nose-bleed," continued Ferguson, "but he forgot about it. Then when he heard about the murder and saw it took place the same night he met Crisponi, he was pretty sure he had something."

Lieutenant Thompson and Detective Manning and Detective Palmetto had then rushed to the rooming house where they found Crisponi and his wife Claire. As soon as Crisponi had seen the detectives, he admitted the murder and took them to the closet where he had hidden his bloody clothes and a thirty-two calibre Colt automatic.

"And that's it?" I felt like ripping up my notes. It was just as I had feared: the case did not have enough investigative mumbo-jumbo for *Squadcar*. Ferguson was not aware of my unhappiness. As far as he was concerned it was a sensational case and well worth the twenty-five dollars he knew I would give him for it. I did not tell him how it appeared on the surface; perhaps I would be able to salvage it. I said, "You say he confessed right away. I thought you got the confession."

Ferguson held up a hand. "I'm coming to that. Sure, he admitted the murder. He went for that right away but he wouldn't open up on the motive. You know Peterson's wallet was missing but Crisponi, he's a smart bastard, you were saying maybe he's crazy, he's smart. The bastard wouldn't go for robbery. No, he didn't know anything about the wallet. He never touched any of the dough. Smart, see? He don't say what he killed him for but it ain't robbery. He's working for temporary insanity." Ferguson smiled. "I was in the office when they brought him in. Thompson, he had a helluva time with him. He's talking to him nice, real nice, just like this guy's gonna say yeah I killed him for dough, where's the chair. Thompson's funny. He claims he don't go for rough-house. He don't usually, but I seen him bust a guy all around a room once. He forgets about that time. But with this Crisponi it's like they're at a bar talking about who's gonna pay the bill. This goes on for more'n a hour and you can believe me, Thompson could have talked to him till he was blue in the face and it wouldn't do no good. I'm stand-

ing there and it's really none of my business, it's not my case, see, but I'm up to here—" he touched his throat—"I'm up to here with it. I'm so sore I can taste it. I'm sore at this bastard for all his damn lies, and if you'd have seen the body you'd have been sore too. Get this now."

I found myself leaning forward. Ferguson's eyes had a gleam to them.

"I can see the Lieutenant's getting nowhere and I can see he knows it too. I speak up, I say, 'Lieutenant, can I have a crack at him?' I'm sure he's gonna say no but he's up to here with it too and he stands up. Get this picture now. Crisponi's where I'm sitting here. This side of the desk. I take Thompson's chair, right where you are but a little closer. There's only this corner of the desk separating us. I got the bastard all measured. I look at him, I say, 'You took the damn wallet, didn't you?' I don't know what he answered or maybe he didn't say anything, just gave me a look. Anyway, I let him have one—" Ferguson's eyes rolled—"I let him have one, honest to God I never hit a guy so hard in my life. See, his stomach was just a little above the desk and I swear, I swear my hand went up to here." His fingers grasped his wrist. "The bastard goes down like a hunk of lead. I thought I killed him. He's laying on the floor. He don't move for five minutes. Then he starts getting up. He gets up like he's in pieces. His hand reached up for the edge of the desk and he pulls himself up to the chair." Ferguson got on his knees and demonstrated. His fingers gripped the desk; his head came up like a red and grinning balloon. "He's sitting there now, his face pale and he's swaying. The fight's out of him I say, 'What about the wallet?' and he just looks at me and I swear this is the way he says it, 'I took it.'" Ferguson, imitating him, spoke in a whisper, his lips protruding. Then Ferguson laughed. "Honest to God, it was funny. I mean funny. And me, I just stood up quiet-like and let Thompson take over. The Lieutenant, he don't say a word to me. He knows I done a job for him, he knows it. The rest is easy. Crisponi talks like his mouth's on hinges now. He'd met Peterson once. Seems one of his debits lives in Crisponi's place. Anyway, Crisponi he needed money bad and he waited for Peterson in front of Peterson's own house, knowing he'd show up some time. And when he did, Crisponi got in the car, dug a gun in his ribs and made him drive to Taberton Hollow where he let him have it. Then Crisponi drove the car to Vanderbilt and Crane and

left it there. But, kid," he said, smacking fist into palm, "I coulda won the championship with that one. It was funny, though. You shoulda seen it. 'I took it'," and once more he imitated Crisponi and laughed.

Maybe I laughed with him; I don't remember. But I know I was in turmoil within. Gone momentarily from my mind was the horror of the murder; Ferguson's own cruelty replaced it. His face had become evil to me, especially when he grinned. Flooding back was the scene I had witnessed in the Safe Squad office.

I was angry; I wanted to show it. "Is that the only way you can get a confession?"

Ferguson did not detect the sarcasm. "Kid, I've been a cop for thirty years. I've sent a lot of guys to the chair. I must have filled up two jails by myself. You know how many confessions I missed out on in all that time? . . . Three." He held up fingers. "Just three. You've got to muss those guys up. They don't know anything else. Sure, some of them might go for it right away, but there ain't too many of them. A guy's got the chair staring him in the face, or life or twenty years say . . . you got a good chance of him coming out with 'yes sir' I did it."

You didn't handle all of them the same though, he said. Some you just slap around once or twice and they fold. Others you had to kick the crap out of them. Once in a while, if you were working in pairs, one cop would go in and rough up the guy until he couldn't see straight; and then afterwards the other cop would come in and he'd play the part of the good guy and he'd put his arm around the bum or give him a cigarette or talk to him about his family. It was all a softening up process, the villain cop and the good-guy cop; and ten to one, after the rough treatment, the guy would be only too happy to confide in a friend. Sometimes you had to do it two and three times, the villain coming in with the heavy fist and then later the good cop making with the soft talk, until finally your boy caught on to what you wanted.

Or sometimes, depending on the suspect's make-up or the current top-level feeling about mussing up a prisoner, you would sit him down and relays of cops would shoot questions at him hour after hour, and this might go on for a day or two or three and it was called keeping a guy on ice, and it would continue until the prisoner's head got as heavy as a Civil War cannon ball and he couldn't keep his eyes open; and if his

head went down you'd lift it up and shake him a little or throw water on him, and the questions would keep coming until he cried out for a fountain pen so he could sign his name to something.

"It's plenty effective," Ferguson said, "but it takes too long. I like to take a shot at the gut. It's quick, it don't show marks and you'd be surprised how it oils up the throat." Perhaps he noticed the look in my eyes, for he said, "Don't feel sorry for those guys, I'm telling you, don't feel sorry for them. When I joined the force I was a real ninny. Soft? Soft as hell! This finger here—" he held up the stub—"that's a story in itself. I got it shot off for no reason. I coulda got killed. If I'd have been ready with my gun it wouldn't have happened. But even that didn't teach me. You know what taught me? A buddy of mine. He was on his cycle and he stopped the driver of a stolen car. He walked up real nice like and you know what he got? A bullet in the heart. He was only twenty, twenty-one. From that time on I was a different guy. I pick up a bum the first thing I do is let him have one quick. If he has a gun, even if he doesn't reach for it, I give him a revolver butt in the teeth. Kid, I got a family. I don't take chances."

No, don't feel sorry for those guys, he said again. He'd seen too many terrible things in his time. If you would see an elderly woman with her head split open and blood streaking into her eyes, or the body of a teen-aged girl with a breast ripped off and her stockings stuffed in her mouth, or a man pistol-whipped into insanity, or a woman screaming over her mutilated child, or James Peterson's kids, for instance, crying into their mother's skirt; if you would see these and worse, far worse, you would muss up a prisoner too, for these things became personal to you.

He'd give me something to think about, he said: this took place in another state. The laws of this particular state did not permit police to keep a person in jail more than twenty-four hours without a charge, and the police were absolutely forbidden to lay a threatening hand on a prisoner. Well in this case he knew about, a store-keeper had been slashed to death by a robber; almost decapitated. The officials were certain who did it, although their evidence was circumstantial; but when they picked up the suspect, he refused to implicate himself and they were unable to ease a confession out of him. Although they drummed up some thin charge to hold him longer than twenty-

four hours, that charge was not strong enough to keep him for ever, and after a few days they had to release him—as free as the innocent. The murder was still listed as unsolved.

“Isn’t that enough to make your blood boil?” Ferguson demanded.

I nodded. My anger of before seemed puerile. I remembered a paper I had written for criminology in college and which the professor had read to the class, about the brutality of police and how it would be better for twenty guilty persons to be set free than one innocent person jailed. My smugness then annoyed me now. Ferguson was right: only those untouched by tragedy could be so smug. I toyed lightly with an idea that I titled in my mind “The Case for the Third Degree”, a fair and factual article that would give both sides of the story. I would do a little more research on it and perhaps query a few editors.

“But getting back to the story,” Ferguson said, “this Crisponi guy is cold, cold as ice. Before I gave him the shot he didn’t have an expression on his face.”

“What about his wife?”

“An innocent victim. Just as much a victim as Peterson’s family.”

I was trying to think of ways to save the case as a story. “Were there any other suspects, Ed?”

“Besides Crisponi?”

“That’s right.”

“Let’s see.” He stroked his chin. “I don’t know, but I think one kid was picked up about an hour after they found the body. He lived in the neighbourhood and a cop picked him up on suspicion. But they let him go right away. You wouldn’t call him a suspect.”

No? I could write three pages about that fellow alone. I typed one word: “kid”. That would be enough for me to remember. Ferguson stood up and put on his coat. He told me he would be unable to get pictures for me because the official ones probably would be submitted as evidence at the trial; but I knew that if the story was ever accepted for publication I could get prints from the newspapers.

As he was buttoning his coat, he stopped and snapped his fingers and said he had a terrific case, one that had broken about five years ago. A hand, severed at the wrist, had been found in a garbage can. Following this, other parts of the body popped up in various sections of the city until it became complete except

for the head, which was never discovered. Through fingerprints the police learned the identity of the victim, a woman, and then by an involved process were eventually able to link the crime to a pal of her husband's.

"Hey that sounds terrific," I said, excited. "Five years ago. You sure it's never been published?"

"I never saw it if it was. It's all dark, you know."

"Oh." My excitement faded and I shook my head. The fact detective books tried to avoid Negro cases. It was prejudice in reverse, based mostly on fear of action by Negro societies.

Ferguson nodded understandingly. "Okay, if there's anything you want, just let me know. But, look, don't call me at the office unless you have to. Try to reach me at home first, okay? I don't feel like going back to a beat."

"Right. In fact you'll be getting a little something from me there in the mail soon."

"Look——" He was about to put on a mild act but then realised he didn't have to play games with me. He smiled. "I like lots of mail."

I walked him to the elevator. Back in my room I looked at my notes and remembered something I had forgotten. I typed: "confession, after hr. of intensive questning, during which crsponi was confrontd with evidence, he realisd futility of denials and admtdt crime. motiv robbery."

The ideal case for a fact detective magazine begins with a crime and then has the detectives following a circuitous path of false leads and innocently involved suspects until by matching clues they eventually are able to finger the guilty; and this usually should take no more than seven thousand words, preferably five. Actually it is the rare crime that matches or even approaches the pattern. Some do, of course, but the great majority are solved through more prosaic means. The criminal drops his social security card at the scene or a witness hears a shot and jots down the licence number of a fleeing car. An angry girl friend or wife reveals what has been told to her in happier day.. A threat is made before witnesses and later the crime is committed. A wife or husband is murdered and chances are it is the mate. An ex-convict forgets to rub off fingerprints. Underworld characters are permitted their few small vices in exchange for reporting any rumble they might hear along the grape-vine.

The problem confronting the fact detective writer is to find a

case that fits an editor's conception of how a crime should be solved, or else attempt to make it fit, and the degree of the problem depends upon the magazine for which he writes. Although probably none of the editors actually condones falsification, some close one eye while many more close both. A few like Davenport wanted stories based only upon the truth. Yet even Davenport, aware that otherwise he would have few cases to publish, permitted some harmless juggling of the facts for story effect, such as, for purposes of intensifying suspense, the changing of time sequences and the invention of conversation. But he fought against blatant falsification, for example the insertion of clues and suspects that never appeared in the actual case.

Studying my notes on the Peterson-Crisponi case, I realised that Davenport would never go for it as it stood. Although the crime was staggering enough, the detective work was far too thin, the tip that led to Crisponi's arrest being the weakest link. It was a shame because I had put time into it already and it would take little more to write it; also I would have to pay off Ferguson anyway. I knew it would be easy for me to save the story with a few insertions here and there, and Davenport would never know. There were many ways: I could have the police find a glove at the death scene and then have them trace it from the manufacturer to a dealer and then to Crisponi; a monogrammed handkerchief could do the trick, or I might work something out with a heel-print discovered in the dried earth near the grave. But I could never do this to Davenport. Quickly I put through a person to person call, collect, to the editor.

"Oh, that's a shame," he said, "that's too bad. I don't think the crime makes up for the lack of police work, do you?"

"Actually it's just another murder when you look at it."

"That's the way I feel. But that's the way I keep ahead of the competition, eh, boy? We may miss out on a few cases but the public appreciates value. And sales show it. They know they only get the best when they open up *Squadcar*. . . . Incidentally, did you get my cheque on Stavinski?"

"Not yet."

"You'll find a little surprise. I've upped your rate to four cents. That's a cent more than I pay anyone else."

"Really? Thanks a million, Howard. It certainly comes in handy."

"You just keep up the good work, hear? You know how I feel about you, Paul."

It warmed me to hear that. Davenport was as good a friend as I would ever have. I hesitated. "Howard. About this Crisponi thing again. I have to pay off one of the cops here and I'd like to get something out of it. You don't mind if I bang it out and send it off to one of the other books, do you?"

". . . You sure it's nothing for me, Paul?" He was always being tugged in two directions; he always worried. Especially about "upstairs"—the term he used for his publisher, whose office was on the floor above his. Davenport took barbiturates four times a day.

"I gave you the facts. If you want me to write it up, swell, but I'd never have done it without telling you first. I thought that tip——"

"Hell, let 'em have it, let 'em have the weak ones. That's what keeps us ahead of them." His voice had become resolute. "As long as you give me first crack, Paul, I don't care what you do after that. You've got to eat. Just give me the hot cases, just give me first crack. Paul—" there was a change of tone again—"you're sending me the affidavit on the Stavinski sentences?"

"I'll mail it off today."

"You know how careful I've got to be."

"Oh, wait a second," I said, remembering. I gave him the prison sentences I had seen on the records, the lesser ones.

"How come, Paul?" Suspicion was only thinly veiled.

I explained what Detective McHugh had told me about judges changing sentences after trial.

"Oh." The friendliness was back in his voice but it was still tinged with worry. "See how you can't be too careful, see what I mean? . . . Okay, Paul, keep in touch, let me know when I can expect something new. I can always use copy."

"Well, there's nothing new, but I'm looking into a few old cases that might work out."

"As long as they've got the stuff and the art's good, I can always use them."

"I'll let you know."

"Good. Take care of yourself, Paul."

I felt wonderful. With my new rate, the seven-thousand worder that originally brought me in around two hundred dollars would now be worth about two-eighty. Davenport was

a friend, all right. I picked up the phone and put through a call to Carl Amsterdam, also in New York. He was the editor of *Dazzling Detective* and I always sold him those cases Davenport could not use. *Dazzling* paid only two cents a word and so it could not expect top-level material. Because I was an established writer in the field, Amsterdam was only too happy to get stories from me, despite the fact he realised I sent him only rejects.

After I outlined the case to him, Amsterdam said, "That sounds terrific. About that tip, though. Do what you can with it. You know how."

"Sure." I thought as I spoke. "I'll make it that the cops broadcast the fact that they were looking for information on the case. Therefore the tip won't be something they got accidentally. This way it's the results of their own efforts—the broadcast."

"Good enough." My suggestion had been the mildest way of softening the tip, but Amsterdam would have let me do anything. "When can I expect copy?"

"Probably the day after tomorrow."

"Good boy."

The first thing I did was take care of the affidavit for Davenport. Then I began outlining the Crisponi story. It could follow any of several patterns I often used and I selected one at random. My big job was to make the police look good: they had to be efficient, observant and, although they might become disgusted or weary, they remained gentlemen. I would start off the easy way, with the finding of the body, and then have the police check the licence plates of the abandoned car and identify the owner. Then one of them would remember the Missing Persons sent out that morning and there would follow a scene with Mrs. Peterson in her home, the children holding on to her and crying, and Mrs. Peterson weeping that her husband never had an enemy in the world. That scene could take up two pages. After this the officers would pick up the kid in the neighbourhood. I would have him loitering near the death scene and the police would arrest him on suspicion. He would have an alibi but it would be the impossible kind to check, so that even though the police would release him they still would keep him in mind, hoping that further evidence would link him with the crime. The kid would have a fictitious name of course and I would throw suspicion on him throughout the story, almost

until the end. Several pages would be devoted to conversation between the investigators, conversation reflecting their great bewilderment. The big scene would come after they broadcast a plea for information, and I would have them in Headquarters, wondering if the appeal would produce results, hoping, despairing, and then have this man come in, and his name would be fictitious too, with his story about Crisponi. Then a rush to Crisponi's flat and the finding of the gun and bloodstained clothes. But I would not have Crisponi admit his guilt immediately, both for the purpose of heightening suspense and increasing wordage. He would break down and confess when fingerprints on the tyre iron matched his own. Of course Detective Ferguson had not said anything to me about fingerprints but I could assume Crisponi's were on them: it would be a minor licence upon my part. The story would end with the line that Crisponi was awaiting disposition of his case as *Dazzling Detective* went to press; and below that, in italics, I would list the fictitious names.

Immediately after lunch I started working on the story. I did not bother with a rough draft. With few exceptions my first draft of these stories was always the final one.

HOWL OF THE HOUND AND THE BLOODY VENGEANCE

By STEVE NORTH

Could one human being possibly have done this to another? Was it conceivable that human hands were behind this fiendish murder?

The face staring up from the grave was no longer a man's face at all. It had been battered raw and bloody. The lips were open and filled with dirt. The holes that once had been eyes were stuffed with dirt also. And in the victim's chest were two large bullet wounds. The killer had used a gun as well as a bludgeon. It was as if he had not been satisfied to murder his victim only once.

Detective Al Palmetto said, "It's enough to get you sick. I only wish I had my hands on the guy who did this."

"You don't mean 'guy', do you?" Detective Phillip Manning commented bitterly. "The word's 'monster'!"

And monster it was. . . .

Who but a monster could have been responsible for a crime such as this, a crime with few equals for brutality in local police annals?

The case had begun earlier that day when John Carmel took his dog for a walk. Little did he know as he entered Taberton Hollow that . . .

By supper time I was almost half-finished with the story. My phone rang about six. It was Ginny's mother. She wanted to know if I could come to see her tomorrow before noon. Although she didn't say what she wanted, she asked me please not to say anything to Ginny about this call.

CHAPTER FIVE

IT WAS a cold raw day and yet my palms were moist as I pressed the buzzer. Mrs. Gordon came to the door. Her smile was pleasant enough; if forced it was well concealed. In the living-room we talked a while about the weather. Then she brushed her dress with her fingertips and looked thoughtful; I knew the first phase had ended.

"Virginia has told me you asked her to marry you, Paul."

"... That's right, Mrs. Gordon." My heart was beating hotly.

"Which is why I wanted to see you of course." She had become stern, businesslike. "I wanted to talk things over with you. After all we hardly know each other."

"I . . . can understand that."

"Mr. Gordon and I . . . naturally we're a little confused. It's happened so quickly, actually. We've never butted into Virginia's life, mind you, never, but this is an important step, and we have to be sure. You see, don't you?" She smiled a little and then the smile disappeared.

I found myself tapping a cigarette out of the pack.

"Virginia has been very close to me, Paul. When she was younger . . . going to business every day, of course, I couldn't be with her as much as I would have wanted to. But actually I feel that's only brought us closer. And then there's another thing. I think you know I had another daughter. She died two years before Virginia was born. One time I thought I was going to lose Virginia too and I prayed to God and He answered me. I may sound all confused to you but I'm just trying to show you what Virginia means to me. She's my entire life. I . . . Mr. Gordon and I . . . we've given her everything she could possibly want. We've protected her from worry, from fear. She's still a child in so many ways, Paul."

I had to restrain myself from saying what was on my mind—how actually she understood so very little about her daughter, how she had hurt as well as helped Ginny, how if Ginny was a child in certain respects it was only because her struggles had not freed her completely from domination.

• "We've pampered her in every way," she was saying. "She's never had to think for herself. You know, she really doesn't have to work but we've let her have her way because we know it's just something that will pass over. She's picked up a lot of peculiar ideas in college . . . but it only proves she still is a child in many ways . . . can't you see, Paul? Don't you see what I'm driving at? I'm talking from a mother's heart. I don't ever want her to be hurt. I want only the best for her. She's my precious darling and she knows so little about the world . . . so very little. She's like a flower that's been raised in a hothouse. That's why Mr. Gordon and I are a little perturbed——"

"Ginny and I are in love with each other, Mrs. Gordon." For some reason it seemed the wrong thing to say then.

"I'm not trying to hurt you, Paul, believe me I'm not. But I recall, Virginia's been in love before."

"I haven't," I said.

A flush played over her cheeks. "I don't for one minute doubt your love for Virginia, Paul. And I don't want you to misunderstand. I like you. Honestly I do. It . . . it's just that I'm trying to do what's best."

"But what is it you're trying to tell me? That you don't approve?"

"I didn't say that. The truth is I don't know. All I want to do is talk it out. I want to get to know you. There's no reason to be hasty. It's too important a step for that. You're a grown man and I can talk to you. Anyway," she added meaningly, "Virginia would never do anything without my approval."

"I wouldn't want her to."

"Of course you wouldn't."

I lighted my cigarette. Every part of my body felt drawn tight. Mrs. Gordon was watching me as I flicked out the match. Then I said, "What do you want to know, Mrs. Gordon?"

"Well——" she began, then stopped. "Well, it's about this . . . this writing you do. That's the part that bothers me. I don't know if you're making a living or if you expect us to help you out." Almost apologetically, "You know, people take us for richer than we are. We're not millionaires, you realise."

I felt my flesh go cold and prickly.

"Oh, we're well off," her voice droned on, "don't misunderstand me. But we're not millionaires. We were discussing the whole thing—Virginia, Mr. Gordon and I. This was Virginia's suggestion but I only mention it for whatever it's worth. She

thought perhaps you could do something in the store, like handle our advertising. That's in your line, I imagine. I——"

"I'm . . . I'm afraid I'm not interested." My body had become one gigantic heart beat.

"Well, honestly, I didn't think you would be. I don't think it's especially a good idea anyway. I've seen instances where parents took the son-in-law into the business or gave him a lot of money and people always wondered if that was the only reason he married the daughter. And it can cause friction in a marriage too. You'd be surprised."

"No I wouldn't." I was standing now. My vision had become blurred from nervousness and anger. Her face shimmered before me like a reflection in water. It was a struggle to control myself.

"Going already, Paul?" She got up also. The smile was there again.

"I have an appointment."

"You see the problem, don't you, dear? That's why I'm interested in knowing more about you, about your writing. It's for your sake as well as Virginia's. She's used to good things, Paul. All her life she's had only the best of everything—clothes, schools, what have you. You can't expect her to change and I'm sure you wouldn't want her to. That's why it's important for you we talk these things out . . . and I think we've made a good start, don't you? Some day we'll continue where we left off. You don't mind, do you?"

"No," I said, "I don't mind."

"Well, I feel better, I must say. I always thought you were sensible. But you hear so much about writers, you never know. Which reminds me . . . you don't strike me as a writer at all."

"Thank you." I was putting on my coat.

"Oh, don't misunderstand, I meant that as a compliment. What I mean is you don't dress crazy or talk funny. You know the things you hear about writers." At the door she gave me her hand. "Good bye, Paul, and thanks for coming."

I headed down the drive to my car.

"Paul."

I turned. Mrs. Gordon waved. "Put on your hat, dear. You don't want to catch cold, do you?"

I had forgotten that I was even holding it.

I did not call Ginny that night or the night after. The follow-

ing morning she phoned me. She wanted to know what was wrong and I told her that I had just been busy. She said she was on her way to work and asked if I would call that night and I said yes, although I knew I would not. About nine that evening she came to my room.

"Paul, why didn't you call me?"

"I've been busy, that's all."

"Paul, what's the matter?"

"My God, does something have to be the matter? All right, I just didn't feel like calling. Does that make you feel better?"

A gloved hand covered her mouth. There was a glisten of tears.

"Paul, talk to me, tell me what's wrong."

"Talk to your mother." I was straightening papers on my desk that did not need straightening. "Talk to her, she can tell you more than I can."

"Paul, what is it? Will you look at me?"

"All right, I'm looking."

"I—I don't understand."

"I had a little talk with your mother," I said crisply. "Didn't she mention it?"

"No . . . no, what did she want?"

"It was more of a business conference, shall we say."

"Paul, will you stop playing games?" she asked desperately.

"I'm really not. That's just about what it was, a business conference. We discussed my potential as a writer and I find that it isn't much. But I think I disappointed your mother. I didn't apply for the job."

"Job?"

"Oh, don't you know? I thought it was your suggestion. You know, that I go into your father's business. It had something to do with advertising but I'm not sure if I was supposed to run copy or be in complete charge."

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

"Paul . . . Paul . . ."

"Look, Ginny. I'm a pretty happy guy. Not completely happy but as much as I guess I could ask for right now. I've got plans and they may work out and they may not but I've got no reason to give up on them. I guess it's too much to ask anyone to understand—"

"Oh, Paul!" She broke into tears and came forward and put her arms around me.

"It's no good, honey," I said. "That's all there is to it."

She pulled away and grasped my arms fiercely. "You're so cold and hard now you scare me. I never knew you could be this way." She wiped her eyes on her gloves. "Can't you understand me, Paul? Don't you realise what I want?"

"Sure. A nice solid normal guy who brings home a pay cheque every week. And preferably a large one."

"How—how could you?"

"Isn't it true?"

"No it isn't, and you know." She had her arms around me again, her head against my chest. I fought against it and yet my arms circled her. I told myself I must not like the smell of her hair too much. "I don't blame you for being angry," she said, "but listen to me and try to understand. We were talking about you that night . . . about us . . . and Mother was so upset and I just mentioned the business because I thought maybe that was a way. I didn't mean anything by it. I want you to do anything you want. All I know is that I love you so very much."

"But it's no good, it's no good."

"Why? Why isn't it?"

"I'm afraid. I'm afraid for you, for myself. I'm afraid it won't work out."

"Why shouldn't it work out, Paul?"

"I've got no right asking of you what I would ask, that's why. Listen to me. Remember what I said about having to believe you can run away from things, that you can escape into . . . happiness? Remember also what I said about . . . wanting something? What I was trying to say then is that coming to this city didn't mean I left behind all the standards and conventions I've lived by. I brought them with me. Ginny, I . . . I want to write . . . books and . . . good things. I know they're in me but still . . . still I'm writing the detective stuff because that means a living, that means I can buy good clothes and eat in fancy restaurants and drive a car. I'm a bohemian in a full-dress suit and I haven't been able to take it off yet. But some day I will, I'm going to do what I have to even at the expense of everything else."

"But I understand that, Paul. Don't . . . don't you think after . . . all this time, how close we've been, that . . . that I know you? Paul, I do understand, I——"

"But if I'm having such trouble by myself, could I possibly do it with someone else, with the responsibility of another person

on my shoulders? I'd want to do things for you, I know, I know myself. I'd want you to have the best, I'd worry——"

"Paul——" she shook my arms a little—"Paul, what do you think I want? I'm not interested in wealth, in beautiful clothes. Would I need you for that? I want you because I see in you everything beautiful that I do want. Paul, I'll help you, believe me I'll help you. I'll work with you, I'll work for you. I believe in you, I have faith in you. You'll write the things you want to write and you'll do it because I'm with you. Can't you see, can't you understand how it will be?"

I held her tighter. I lifted her face and pressed my cheek against hers. "I used to tell myself that I'd never get married because the marriage I'd want would be so perfect that it wouldn't be humanly possible. I'd want it to be something wonderful and beautiful and perfect. There are men I know and they run around and it gets me sick and that's something I'd never want. It should be beautiful always."

"It can be, Paul," she breathed.

"Let's get married, darling. Tonight. Let's not wait."

"Tonight?"

"Let's do it without thinking. The trouble with us, we always think too much."

"Where can we go?"

"Rayville."

"Would we be back tonight?"

"No, of course we wouldn't."

"What can I tell Mother?"

"You're at Vivian's. You've often stayed there."

"Oh, Paul." She rubbed her forehead.

"Please, darling."

She touched her breast. "My heart's beating so fast."

"No faster than mine."

She squeezed the back of her neck. "Paul, what's my phone number? Isn't it funny, I forget my own phone number."

CHAPTER SIX

RAYVILLE was a marriage factory just across the state line, and although it probably had other industries I had never heard of them. To this small city rushed lovers in haste for here there was a minimum of delay: no blood tests, and marriage certificates preceded the ceremony by only a few minutes. And it was a competitive business too. As we entered the city one block alone had several houses with brightly lighted signs on their lawns or gate-posts offering matrimonial services.

I slowed the car. "Take your pick."

Ginny's face was flushed. Her teeth scraping her lower lip, she nodded at one that read: JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, and in slightly smaller letters, "Marriage Ceremonies With Dignity."

"That's what we want," I said. "Lots of dignity." I stopped the car and we got out. We studied the large white frame house, set off by a long stretch of lawn. The sign, spotted by a light near a clump of bushes, creaked uneasily in the wind. A light was on in the side bay window. We walked up the path toward the porch. Ginny was clutching my hand tightly. I pressed the bell and soon the door opened and a husky florid-faced man stood there, wearing a black and red checkered flannel shirt, open at the throat, and baggy-kneed corduroy trousers and bedroom slippers. He was the Justice of the Peace. His hand felt hard and calloused when it gripped mine but he had a kind and probably practised jovial voice.

He called three other people into the living-room from the kitchen; these were his wife, daughter and son-in-law. The son-in-law was holding a pack of cards. The whole thing struck me as a scene from a movie and I felt as though all this was happening to someone else and that I was just an onlooker. They were friendly and tried to put us at our ease.

The ceremony lasted no more than two minutes and all I remember clearly is the pressure of Ginny's hand and a droning voice and a large beaded multicoloured lamp-shade somewhere behind the voice. And then the voice asked if I had a ring and my hands for some reason went through my pockets and then I

Blushed hotly and pulled off my college ring and put it on Ginny's finger. It was so big it would have slipped off but she held it on with her thumb. Soon I was kissing her and her lips felt cool and dry against mine, and I did not know if it was her heart or mine that was pounding so heavily. And now everyone was laughing.

In the car, with the marriage certificate in my pocket, one of those flowery things with birds carrying inscribed ribbons in their beaks, Ginny put her arms around me; but she would not let me kiss her right away and she just held on to me, her cheek on mine. A minute passed and I let her stay that way. Then I felt her hold relax and I put both hands on her cheeks and raised her face and kissed her on the lips. There was a little strangling noise in her throat.

I said, "Happy, darling?"

"Of course I'm happy."

"There's a nice hotel here in town. Should we stay there?"

"Let's drive for a while. Do you mind, Paul? I just feel like driving."

"Anything you say, darling."

We drove out of Rayville. For miles Ginny sat wordlessly with her head against the back of the seat. I would look at her now and then and she seemed to be in a tiny world of her own, but from her expression it was hard to tell if it was a happy one.

"What're you thinking about, Ginny?"

"You."

"What about me?"

"Lots of things."

"Good things?"

She put her arm through mine. "Of course good things."

We drove on in silence. After a few miles I said, "Mrs. Weiler," and when she did not answer I nudged her. "Hey, don't you know your name?" She sat up straight and smiled. She blinked several times, like she'd been stirred from a dream.

"I like that name," she said.

"You'd better. Ginny, we'd better decide. Do you want to stay in the city? We're about half-way home."

Weakly, "The city?"

"It'd be silly to go back to Rayville."

"It . . . just makes me feel funny."

"We won't see anyone we know."

"It's not exactly that. It's . . . I—I don't know what it is."

Then, "Won't it look peculiar? I mean . . . we don't have any . . . suit-cases."

"Say, ain't we married, huh?"

"But they won't know."

"So who the devil cares?"

"I don't know what's the matter with me," she said.

"You just relax and let your husband take care of everything."

" . . . I like that word."

"Relax?"

"No, silly. Husband."

"Silly husband?"

I had her laughing, and meanwhile I stepped harder on the gas.

We stopped at the Hamtnond, which was the most exclusive hotel in the city. As Ginny and I walked in, she whispered something about having no marriage ring. She sat near the door while I went to the desk. The clerk had a starched look. Yes, he had a double room; please sign the register. His palm dropped on the bell and a uniformed figure materialised next to me. For the first time the room clerk realised I had no luggage; his face reflected restrained distaste. He asked if I had some identification and I produced my driver's licence, which he compared with the register. There was a trace of apology about his manner now as he said I would have to pay in advance.

Ginny came over only when she saw the bellboy accompany me to the elevators. There was colour on her cheeks. Our room was on the twenty-second floor: it was large and comfortably furnished. While Ginny, her coat on, looked out the window, the bellboy opened and closed drawers, inspected the bathroom and peered into the closet. She did not turn even when I locked the door behind him.

Throwing my coat over a chair, I walked to her. She still did not stir. I circled her waist from the back. Her hands closed on mine. I kissed her neck. She did not move. I turned her and kissed her on the mouth. For a moment her lips were hard. Then they grew soft and she clutched my arms. After a while she drew back. The flush on her cheeks had deepened.

She said, "You had trouble at the desk, didn't you?"

"Trouble?"

"I saw you looking in your wallet."

"That, darling, is where I keep my money."

"Before you paid him, I mean."

"What's the frown about?"

•
“Didn’t they think we were married?”

“You’re a worry wart, you realise that?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, darling.”

“Happy, honey?”

“... Yes.”

“That was a pretty slow answer.”

“Of course I’m happy, darling.”

“Love me?”

“You know I do.”

“Than take off your coat and make yourself at home. We’re going to be married a long, long time.”

She unbuttoned it slowly. I hung both our coats in the closet. She was staring out the window again. This time she turned when I approached. I kissed her. I took off my jacket and tie. A warmth was in my stomach and it edged upward like a flame reaching out. My undershirt came off. I wrestled with the top button of her blouse.

•
“Please, Paul . . . not with the lights—”

I could not listen. I took one button at a time. Her arms hung, her head was to one side. She was wearing a white slip and I put my arms under the blouse and around her back and on her shoulders. Her arms did not rise to hold me. I kissed her but her lips had become firm.

•
“Ginny, what’s the matter?”

“I—I can’t . . . not this way.”

“Do I offend you?”

“No, darling, it’s not that. It’s not your fault. It’s all mine. It’s just that so much has happened in one night. I’m still in a daze.”

•
“I’m a real beast, you know that? Beauty and the beast.”

“Stop that.”

“It’s true. I’m being selfish. Look, you sit down and smoke a cigarette. I’m going to take a shower. The cigarettes are in my jacket.”

I undressed in the bath-room. The needle shower was exhilarating. Afterwards I put on my shorts, opened the door and peered out. Ginny was sitting on the chair, staring vacantly and smoking. Her blouse was buttoned.

“Don’t look,” I joked, “I’m coming out.”

She closed her eyes. Only when I was under the covers did she look. Her eyes still held that far-off expression. My arms went under my head. “Hey, Mrs. Weiler.”

She smiled fleetingly. "Hey yourself."

"It's mighty lonely under here."

She jabbed out her cigarette and stood up. She came over and kissed me and then went into the bathroom. The moment the door closed behind her, I put on the light next to the bed, got up and turned out the overhead light. In bed again, I fluffed up the pillow and smoked, the ash tray on the cover over my stomach. By the time I finished the cigarette, Ginny still had not started to shower. Impatiently I glared at the door. She was moving around in there; the spigot went on and off; there was the crackling sound of a comb going through hair. Another cigarette. It was almost a butt before the shower started drumming into the tub. She showered for more than fifteen minutes. I could hear her stepping out now. I lowered the pillow and turned on my stomach. My heart seemed to be pounding up at me from the mattress. There was the flapping of the towel in the bath-room and then I heard the soft easy brushing of it over her body. She seemed to be taking forever. She had been in there close to three quarters of an hour. I did not realise how tightly my fists were clenched until I relaxed them; my palms were wet. I closed my eyes in irritation as the faucet went on once more. Further combing. I found myself staring at the door; I wanted to jump out of bed and pull it open and carry her out. The clink of the comb against the porcelain of the sink. Now? I was still on my stomach, my hands under my face. More walking around; then the spurt of the faucet. I shut my eyes. Tightly. The faucet went off, the door opened. She padded out softly. I pretended I was asleep.

The shade went up. She opened the window. Now I could feel her standing by her side of the bed. The bed sagged, and suddenly my thighs were quivering. I waited, hopefully. I wanted her to come to me. She turned out the light on the night table. Gently, as if not to wake me, she arranged her pillow. I could feel her settling. My head was turned from her and there was the soft glow of her breath on my neck. My flesh tingled. I sensed she was looking at me. Then she shifted to her other side: a shock of some sort exploded within me and all at once I was rubbing my eyes and pretending I had been disturbed out of a deep sleep.

"Ginny, you up?"

"Yes, darling." She was looking at the ceiling now.

"Were you asleep?"

"No . . . I just came to bed."

I brought her to me. She was wearing her slip. I kissed her. Her lips were like buds of granite.

I said, "Don't you want me to kiss you?"

"Of course I do, darling." Her lips softened, her arms circled me. The hands on my back were icy, chills raced through me at the touch, but her face was hot. I could feel the trembling of her heart. After a moment I eased the slip off her and kicked away the cover. Then she lay back, her head turned to one side away from me, her eyes closed as if she did not want to see me looking at her. I could not help it; there was a thundering in my ears. Moonlight sprayed the room. Her face was tense, her lips pressed together as though she was clenching her teeth. There was a blotch of colour on her throat. Her body was white and beautiful and gently rounded; she lay with one leg bent and partly covering the other. She was born to be naked in the moonlight. I brushed the bangs from her forehead and kissed her there. She said, "Put the covers over us, Paul." I did. Her hands clutched my shoulders now; they were still cold.

I tried to relax her. I spoke to her gently, kissing her under the ear where it smelled so delicious and clean, like a baby's ear, and then on the lips which could not quite become soft again. When I touched her she seemed not to feel it. It was only when I stopped and just put my arms around her that she was at ease. For a long time we lay like that. Then I began to caress her again. For a while I thought she was responding, but then all at once I became aware that her arms had fallen from me and I looked to see a face that was tight with a pain that was not physical, eyes squeezed together and corded veins showing in her temples.

"Ginny, what's the matter, what's wrong?"

With a strangled moan she buried her head against my chest and cried bitterly. She still clung to me even when the tears were gone.

"Ginny, what's wrong, what have I done?"

"I . . . I don't know," she answered weakly. "I . . . I don't mean to be this way. It's . . . I just feel strange and . . . like we're doing wrong. It's . . . it's like that night . . . on the sofa. Maybe . . . maybe it's running away that did it."

"Ginny, listen to me. Will you listen to me? Will you listen to this? . . . Nothing we do together can be wrong. It can only be beautiful. Ginny, do you know what I want? Listen, listen

to me, darling. I want us to be just like one person, so close that we're like one body . . . one body and one breath. I don't want anything ever to seem dirty or cheap or wrong . . . because it just can't be. Ginny, we could be together in an alley and it would be right . . . because it's us. I . . . I don't want any walls between us—no shame or fear or guilt. Ginny, I . . . I don't think I could stand it that way."

"I . . . want all those things too, Paul. I . . . just don't know what . . . what's gotten into me."

"Are you afraid of me?"

" . . . No."

"Ginny, you mustn't be afraid. How could you be afraid or ashamed of . . . of anything that we could do? God, darling, it's you and me, we're married, we're man and wife, we love each other, we—Ginny, I want you so much! I want you . . . so much and yet . . . and yet, darling, if you don't want me I won't touch you. Do you believe me?"

"I do, Paul, I do."

"I want to enjoy you but I want you to enjoy me also. Darling, one's no good without the other. That's the only way it could be wrong. Can't you understand that, Ginny?"

"I do, Paul, I understand. Have . . . patience with me."

" . . . Can I just hold you?" I asked softly after a time.

"I—I want you to."

I gathered her in my arms. For many minutes we remained like that. I lifted my head. "Can I kiss you? I want to kiss you."

She nodded and closed her eyes. Her lips were more responsive this time but still she could not quite relax entirely; she could not lose her tenseness. I did not want her this way, yet the blood was roaring and seething within me; and when she gave herself to me it was with strained conscious effort that could not quite become free and of itself, as if she were struggling to grasp a passion. And then afterwards, in a faint voice, "Paul, was it all right, was I all right then?"

"You were, darling," I had to say. This wonderful little child, how I loved her!

"Did I . . . make you feel good?"

"Of course you did, honey."

"Are you happy?"

"I'm very happy, darling." I kissed her lightly. Although I didn't want to ask, for I *knew*, something made me: "Did anything happen to you, honey?"

“ . . . What do you mean, Paul?”

“What happened to me . . . did it happen to you?”

“I don’t know, Paul.” There was a sudden weariness in her tone.

“You would if it did.”

“It . . . doesn’t matter,” she smiled. “It doesn’t make any difference. I’m just happy . . . I made you happy.”

“Are you sleepy? You sound sleepy.”

“Just . . . a little.”

“You go to sleep.”

“I will. Just . . . keep your arms around me. All night. Promise?”

“I promise.”

Her body soon went limp in my arms. She fell asleep at least an hour before I did. She got up ahead of me in the morning. She was fully dressed when she woke me. The first thing she wanted to know was how we would break the news to her parents.

“I don’t believe it,” Mrs. Gordon said in a hollow voice.

“It . . . it’s true, Mother.”

“I don’t believe it, I can’t believe it! You wouldn’t do anything like that to me!” Her voice kept rising. She whirled on her husband. “Max, what do we do? Do something, say something!”

Mr. Gordon rubbed his lips and glared at me. He was certain now of his anger. He hadn’t been up to then.

“You goddam little fools,” he said. It seemed incongruous, his using a curse word.

“Please, Daddy,” Ginny whimpered. Mr. Gordon had been our one hope.

“The disgrace . . . the disgrace . . .” Mrs. Gordon kept shaking her head from side to side. “All my plans, all my hopes.” She touched her chest and let out a little groan.

“Mother, what is it?” Ginny cried out in alarm.

“Go away from me!” Mrs. Gordon waved her arms. “Get away from me, I can’t look at you! I want to die and I don’t even want you at my grave!”

“Oh, God!” Ginny broke into tears and covered her face with her hands. “Oh, God, God, God!”

I was at Ginny’s side, trying to comfort her. Her body shook convulsively. Mrs. Gordon was shouting now that it was all my

fault, every bit of it, and why did I have to come along and why couldn't I have remained in New York, and I was a scoundrel and a liar and a leech. And all this time Mr. Gordon kept circling Ginny and me, his fists clenched, and then he went to the sofa, sat on the arm, pulled out a cigar and bit off the tip. He struck a match, the first time I had ever seen him actually smoke.

Soon Mrs. Gordon had shouted herself out but the silence that followed was only an uneasy truce.

"You're not going through with this, you know," she said tightly to Ginny. She was sitting like a statue, hands clasped on her lap. "You know that, don't you? You're not going through with it."

The quiet severity of her mother's voice stiffened Ginny. "You can't do a thing about it."

"You're not going through with it," Mrs. Gordon repeated. She stood up slowly. "I swear to that on my life."

"You can swear all you like. I've got the right to live my own life. I'm not a baby."

To me, "How much do you want?" I frowned and Mrs. Gordon nodded. "That's right, I mean money."

"Look, Mrs. Gordon——"

"I'm not joking," She whirled and hurried into the dining-room. She was back with a cheque book which she waved at me. Her look had become insane. "I don't know what hold you have on my daughter but I'm willing to pay. I'll pay anything for her happiness."

"Oh, Mother," Ginny moaned.

"You keep out of this! . . . Well?"

"Mrs. Gordon, listen to me——"

"Just name your price. I'd give anything to be rid of you."

Ginny pulled me away from her. "You're not going to make a fool of me like this, do you hear? You've led my life for me long enough and I'm sick and tired of it! I'm a woman and I want to be a woman! I——"

Mrs. Gordon's hand came around swiftly and slapped Ginny's face. Ginny was stunned. Her cheeks and lips trembled. There were tears in her eyes. Mr. Gordon had leaped to his feet. I took Ginny's arm.

"Let's get the devil out of here," I said sharply.

We were near the door when we heard a loud groan. Mrs. Gordon had both hands clamped on her head. Her face seemed

white-washed. She took a step forward, then stumbled and fell. She lay motionless on the floor. Ginny ran toward her. Mrs. Gordon's eyes were closed, her lips bloodless. While Ginny ran for water, Mr. Gordon and I carried Mrs. Gordon to the sofa. I put a cushion under her legs so that the blood could flow back to her head. Ginny returned with a face-cloth dripping water. She looked faint herself. She bathed her mother's face. Mrs. Gordon stirred. Her eyelids flickered open. She wet her lips. When she saw I was rubbing her wrists she tugged her hands away and gestured weakly.

"Get out . . . get out . . ."

Ginny looked at me. "Wait for me in the car, Paul. Please."

"I don't want to leave you."

"Please, Paul, do as I say."

I clamped on my hat and walked to the door. Ginny was squatting on the floor, rubbing her mother's forehead. Mr. Gordon hovered anxiously over his wife, I sat in the car.

Looking at the house, I realised that what was going on in there now could change, pattern or destroy our lives together: Ginny might not even come away with me. Fifteen minutes trembled by. I found myself looking at the door more and more; then I turned on the radio but in irritation snapped it off almost immediately. Not even a cigarette, either. And then the front door opened. Ginny was holding a suitcase. She walked fast. I took the suitcase from her and put it in the back of the car. She got in without a word. Her face was pale and I could not tell if its expression was one of hurt or anger. But I knew better than to ask. Quickly I drove away.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WE lived in my room for two weeks until we found an inexpensive apartment. It belonged to a young couple who were friends of Ginny's and who were moving to California. Their lease had eleven months to run and we took it over.

It was the only apartment on the second floor of a three-story brownstone house in the downtown section of the city. A physician named Michaels owned it: he was a widower and lived on the first floor, behind his office. Two spinsters whom we rarely saw occupied the third. They wore old brown fur pieces and raised parakeets.

We fell in love with our apartment immediately. Ginny's friends had been commercial artists and the place reflected their taste, and somehow our own. The rooms were light and airy, the furniture, which we'd bought from them, neoteric and cleanly functional, with odd-curved chairs and stem-legged tables and lamps you could twist on their slender goosenecks.

My desk was in the living-room, facing the windows overlooking the street. Bookcases were fitted under the sills. The street was one of the few in the downtown area that boasted trees: poplars with silvery ice-sheathed limbs those first weeks. Near the corner, fronting an old "Apothecary Shop" with vessels of tinted fluid and a mortar and pestle in its window ("Prescriptions and Biologicals"), was an iron hitching post: every house had a mud-scraper fixed to the pavement next to steps. The street defied the years in its own still way. At dusk it would not have surprised me to see a lamplighter with his pole.

Ginny and I enjoyed things together: the finding of quaint eating-places, and concerts and operas high in the peanut gallery, and shopping for wondrous things we had no intention of buying, and foreign movies where we compared our French and raced against the English titles and each other; even carrying bundles home from the food market was fun, with the good smell of coffee in the loose package; and sitting in the

kitchen at night over a snack, smoking cigarettes and talking; or just taking a drive or reading quietly. And Ginny taught me to like walking in the rain at night, when the puddles glisten and look deep, and one evening we went ice skating in the park. We kept a large cat in the kitchen and we dropped all our pennies into the slot between its slanty eyes.

She had the ability to make friends easily and, often embarrassing to me at the time, at the oddest places: by starting a conversation while waiting for a seat in a movie she became acquainted with the Loeb's, a refugee couple who were both studying to be lawyers, and the following day they were having dinner at our place and soon we bought Theatre Guild tickets together; there were the Craigs—Hillary and John—he was a cellist in the civic symphony orchestra whom she met while gazing into a greeting-card shop window and who clung to us thereafter; and there were others. My own few close friends in the city, most of them unmarried, were always welcome in the apartment.

Ginny had a vast amount of energy. One night a week she went to art class and, although she worked hard at her job, she also found delight in being a housewife: she loved the creativeness of cooking and often spoke of it as her only realised talent. Her interest in all things, her exuberance, became contagious. Although she could be amusingly quixotic at times, she stimulated me constantly.

I did a great amount of work. Davenport kept after me in his usual way and, although I did two cases for him that first month, I also wrote a few short fiction pieces that pleased me. One of these sold to a leading magazine in the so-called "quality" field. While I banged out the detective stuff quickly and with little thought, never showing it to Ginny, the fiction was the result of much heart-probing and many drafts; and I would not consider a story complete until Ginny had read it, until we had discussed it. In a way my fiction was a product of our combined efforts, for even though her ideas were very often unworkable in a practical sense, they kept me thinking, searching. Ginny made me restless. With her I could not remain static.

She spoke of her parents frequently, without bitterness but a little sadly.

Emotionally, Ginny thrived on affection. She had to have it for her own existence. She needed me to hold her, to kiss her gently, to talk with great tenderness to her. Love to her was

these things, caresses and soft words, and no more; beyond that she could not step; what stretched beyond was for me alone. She recognised my needs, and in the face of them was complacent, understanding and kind: wifely. But she could not join me in the wild waters; she waited for me patiently on the beach and, knowing I could not play the brute, claimed she found pleasure in it. Perhaps she did; for my own sake I had to believe it. And loving her for all the good things she meant to me, I fell into an acceptance of my role and tried never to offend her.

The issue of *Dazzling Detective* carrying my story on the Crisponi-Peterson murder came in the mail. Ginny brought the magazine to my desk but she had time only to glance through it cursorily before leaving for work. Amsterdam, in the way of many editors, had changed my title for no apparent purpose. Emblazoned across two pages and partly superimposed upon the symbolic picture of a fist claspng a tyre iron was:

THE SCREAMING DEATH AND THE HOWLING DOG

Beneath it the blurb read: OUT OF THE SHADOWS A TERROR CAME STALKING AND IN HIS EYES WAS—MURDER!

There was a picture of Peterson, with the caption "An insurance agent, he had no insurance against sudden death." A shot of the slayer, surrounded by detectives, pointing with linked hands at the grave of his victim: "Here, in the light of justice, the murderer reveals a crime committed in the blackness of night." The dog, head pressed against his front paws, who had uncovered Peterson: "He sought a bone, found a body." There was a full-view shot of Crisponi, showing a narrow hollow-checked face, a thinning widow's peak, eyes small and expressionless: "For a handful of dollars, he took a life." A detective: "In all his experience, never a more brutal crime than this." And a photograph of Peterson's widow and two children: "'Mama,' they kept crying, 'when is Daddy coming home?'"

I checked the story casually and put it aside without further thought.

After dinner that night, Ginny asked to see the magazine. I showed it to her reluctantly. This was the first detective story of mine that had been published since we were married.

"You're not going to read it, are you?"

"Of course I am." She sat on the sofa, folding the magazine lengthwise.

My face felt warm. Apologetically, "It's pretty bad."

"Now you be quiet."

I went to the kitchen for a drink of water and kept myself busy until I felt she was finished. When I came back she was thumbing through other stories.

"Lousy, huh?" I asked weakly.

"It's not *lousy*." She spoke the word in a sort of drawl, as if she could think of gentler ones to carry the same meaning.

"You know how I bang those things out," I said defensively.

"It's really not written too badly," she said, and immediately I felt better. Now I wanted her to say that it was good. "The ending is funny, though," she continued. "It leaves you hanging in mid-air."

"You mean because it has Crisponi waiting for trial?"

"That's right, you want to know how it ends."

I explained how competition between the magazines, the desire to come out with a case first, was the reason why cases were published before trial; but most of the magazines carried a column or a box every now and then which brought the readers up to date on the dispositions of cases published previously. Ginny wanted to know about the names at the end of the story which were listed as fictitious. I told her that they were to shield the identities of those people who either had been drawn into the case as false suspects or who might claim to have been libelled in some way by the story; this was done even though their true names might have appeared previously in the newspapers.

"Paul, when does this Crisponi go on trial?"

"Next week some time. We've got to start praying soon."

"For what?"

"That he's found guilty."

Shocked, "Paul, that's terrible!"

"Why?"

"Because you're wishing a man goes to the electric chair, that's why. How . . . how could you?"

I laughed. "He doesn't have to go to the chair, hon. He doesn't even have to get life. He can get a year in prison for all I care. I just want him to be found guilty."

"But why? What difference——"

"Because if he's found innocent he might sue the magazine for damages. He could sue me also, and I might have to get a mortgage on you."

She shook her head. "Paul, do you ever get nightmares because of these stories?"

"Me?"

"I don't think I'd ever be able to sleep." Firmly, "I've decided something. I don't like your murder business at all. I don't like the people you write about."

"Darling," I smiled with a flourish of melodrama, "it's all part of the human scene. I write of life with a capital L."

"Phooie." She made a face.

"If you want to know the truth," I said, "I'm finding those damn stories harder to do every time. My brain begins regurgitating. I find I can't think along the same corny lines any more. It takes physical effort."

"Good, wonderful! It's a sign of progress. And now I'm going to tell you something." She reached for a cigarette. "I told you that Crisponi thing wasn't too bad: I think it's awful. Awful for you," she amended hurriedly, seeing my look. "If someone else wrote it I'd say it was marvellous. But you, you're capable of such beautiful writing it's a crime to waste your talent on such . . . on such—well, you know. It might actually hurt you, drain you. Paul, I wish you could stop doing those stories."

"So do I."

"Then why can't you?"

"Because I think I'd worry myself to death without . . . well, without that security."

"But we'd get along, Paul. How much do we need? I'm working and you'll be selling *something* and . . . I bet it'd even work out better. After a while I *know* it would. Paul, I've got such faith in you, you're such a . . . good writer, I——"

"Some day, honey. But . . . first let me start selling fiction more regularly. Then I'll kick out the detective junk. But I . . . I just can't do it this way. It's . . . not in me. I've . . . got to go . . . slow. I just have to do it . . . my way."

"All right. But anyway I only want you to write as many of those stories as . . . you think you have to. But no more. Maybe . . . maybe no more than one a month."

"God," I said, hugging her, "and here I was afraid you'd be the one keeping me chained to the hack stuff."

"You also told me you were afraid of yourself, remember?"

"... Yes, I remember." Then, slowly, "You know, I've been thinking about a novel."

"Oh, tell me," she exclaimed, her face brightening.

There wasn't too much to tell yet: I would have to do a lot more thinking. The idea was one I'd had for quite a while, but now it was taking shape, growing. It was a little too early to pull it out of the hot-house of my brain, to examine its parts critically: it might wither quickly under rough and premature handling.

"I want the thing to jell in my mind a while," I said, "before we talk it over. Once I get it settled up to a point, then we can kick it around. I'll really need you then."

"Oh, I'd want to help you, I'd want to help you."

"My plan is to do the novel and just write enough of the detective stuff to carry us along, I'm going to forget short fiction for a time."

"Paul, I'm so excited! I've no idea what your book's about but I just know it's going to be good. It's going to be a best-seller and——"

"Just let me write it first, will you please?" I grinned.

Detective Ferguson came unexpectedly to the apartment one evening. He was on duty in Headquarters and was here in his dinner hour: he had brought me a police folder on a case.

"It was a murder took place about two years ago," he said. "I just happened to think of it and I pulled out the records while no one was around. You can keep 'em a couple days but I'll have to have 'em back. They're the official ones. I figured instead of sitting down with you on it, you could take it right from the records. Everything's in there, I think. If there's anything else you want on it, you can ask me later."

"Is this a case you worked on?"

Ferguson nodded and wet the tip of a cigarette before lighting it. His hat, brim up, was pushed back on his head. A plaster covered a boil on his neck. "Yeah," he said, looking where to put the match, "I was still a big man then. In fact I worked on it with *him*"—the Lieutenant. "He'd just taken over Homicide and Christ he didn't know his——" He checked himself. "He didn't know too much."

Pointing at the folder I was holding, Ferguson said there was something in it that should interest me. He'd glanced through it in the office and seen where Lieutenant Thompson had written an eye-witness account of the killer's execution.

"I don't know what the heck he wrote it up for," he commented. "I guess it was the first frying he'd seen and he thought he'd write a book. The first one can get you, though it didn't bother me none. They oughta fry 'em all. Any bum's been in jail more'n twice oughta burn. Any guy they find with a gun they oughta stick right in the chair. No trial, no nothing, right into the chair."

The case, which I read after Ferguson left, was a good one. A young unemployed labourer named Rodriguez had slain his blonde sweetheart, and the investigation had enough element to make it usable despite its age. Although Rodriguez had confessed hacking his paramour to death, he had recanted the story several days before his execution.

Lieutenant Thompson's description of the electrocution was typed on onion-skin paper and stapled against thin cardboard backing.

. . . I was about twelve feet from the chair, an ugly thing with straps. The room was dimly lighted but directly over the chair was a large silvery ventilator that had lights inside. A tub filled with water was on one side of the chair. A heavy leather mask rested on its rim. The executioner who looked like a neighbour of mine, a friendly person, was dressed in plain clothes and went about his work in a bored business-like way. He kept wringing sponges into the tub and looked like he didn't like getting his hands wet. Finally he placed one of the sponges inside the mask that had heavy coloured eyepieces. A guard stood on each side of the chair and several more lined the walls behind. On the floor in front of the chair were the electrodes, half-covered by a towel. Other towels hung from a rope.

Soon we could hear a chanting in the corridor. It kept coming closer. All at once there was a terrible scream. Then the door opened and a priest walked in chanting. But there was screaming behind him and now Rodriguez was led in. He fought and yelled like a wild man, wrestling with the two guards who held each arm. Another guard walked behind in case Rodriguez broke loose. The condemned man fought and screamed each inch of the way. I felt a little funny in my stomach and had to force myself to look. He was wearing a white shirt unbuttoned at the throat and there was a slit in the left trouser leg. He wore slippers and his hair had been

shaved off. One of the slippers came off in the struggle and he was to die with one foot bare. Once they got him in the chair, the guards who'd stood on each side jumped into action like they'd rehearsed it. One tightened the straps around him and then lowered the mask over his head, and the other connected the electrodes to his left leg. The priest stood in front of the condemned man and kept praying. Rodriguez had stopped screaming and I thought I could hear him praying also beneath the mask.

The warden then raised his hand and the executioner pulled the switch. Rodriguez strained against the straps. Then the executioner turned a small wheel which applied the voltage. He kept turning it back and forth, and each time Rodriguez's body rose and fell. Soon the body began crackling and smoke came from the leg and head, drifting up the ventilator. The executioner then consulted his watch and turned off the current. He unstrapped the chest strap and wiped the dead man's chest. The priest stepped forward and made a cross on the dead man's chest with the oils of Extreme Unction, and then he wiped it away. A physician examined the body with a stethoscope and pronounced Rodriguez dead.

We filed out as the guards lifted the body from the chair. As I walked by I could detect the odour of burnt flesh. The warden, this time, led us past the other cells. One was occupied. The prisoner was sitting on his cot, his back to us. We passed Rodriguez's cell. His cot was messed, the chair pulled back as if he had been sitting there up to the last minute.

Outside at last we stood in a small group. The strain was on everyone's face. Everyone seemed to be gulping in the fresh air. After a while we shook hands and split up. The execution had left me morbid but it also made me more aware than ever of my great responsibility. Although I am not against the electric chair, one must always be so very sure. . . .

Slowly I folded the papers along their crease. Thompson's report lingered with me long after I had gone to bed: the cruel efficiency of the electrocution appalled me. Only by recalling the brutality of Rodriguez's crime was I able to ease it from my mind.

On Monday of the following week, Peter Crisponi, who earlier

had changed his plea from not guilty to guilty and had thrown himself on the mercy of the court, was sentenced to the electric chair. It was only of passing interest to me, for on that same day I started working on the first chapter of my novel. Basically it was to be the story of my father's life as I saw it: the story of a physician who all his days wanted to be a surgeon and yet, trapped by circumstance, by family obligations and responsibilities, remained a general practitioner, a success to everyone but himself. The novel was to end on the note that by fostering his son's ambition to be a writer, he exorcised his own frustration; and this book, my book written in the first person, was to be the son's tribute.

By the end of that month I had completed four chapters. They felt good to me and Ginny was enthusiastic about them. But still, never having written a novel before, I ached to know if I was heading in the right direction and so I sent the chapters and an outline of those to follow to one of the largest publishing firms in New York.

Three weeks after I mailed them off, Ginny hurried into the living-room with a letter from the publisher: it was not the large self-addressed manilla envelope I'd enclosed with the manuscript, but rather a slender white business-like one.

"Paul," Ginny whispered, "Paul, darling, I've got a feeling."

Nervously I tore open the envelope. Ginny read over my shoulder. Then she let out a shriek, flung her arms around me and began to cry.

The letter said that Hardiman & Co., Publishers, thought enough of the chapters and outline to want to take an option on the book. I should let them know if this was satisfactory; and, if so, a cheque for five hundred dollars would be forthcoming.

That night in celebration we went to, the finest Chinese restaurant in the city where, after courses of Won Ton soup and eggroll and barbecued spareribs, the affable shrill-voiced owner insisted we try the large sweet and pungent butterfly shrimp. And somehow we managed. We'd had tickets that night for the City Opera Company's *Aida*, but when I went to the box office I exchanged our balcony seats for orchestra.

In the scene where Rhadames returns victorious to Egypt with his Ethiopian captives and the stage is filled with the whirl and grace of jubilant dancing girls, I could not tear my gaze from the slant-eyed prima ballerina who, half-naked and her hair and

body gilded, writhed like some tormented gold metallic demon. She was monstrous and yet beautiful, evil and yet exciting, not quite human and yet human above all.

That night, while I made love to Ginny, the gilded creature writhing yet in my mind made exotic and strangely terrifying love to me.

• CHAPTER EIGHT

DAN O'CONNOR called me about three weeks later to ask if I'd meet him at the Pencil Bar in half an hour. I was in no mood for an afternoon drink but Dan insisted, saying he was going on the night trick tomorrow and had to talk to me. Dan was a newspaperman I'd become friendly with shortly after I came to this city; and knowing how he was always low on funds and high on schemes, I was sure he wanted to discuss either a loan or a new idea. Dan, a couple years older than I, was thoroughly likeable despite a bad case of "short man's disease": aggressive, frenetic, he was a gadfly with more buzz than bite. From what I could tell drive compensated for minimal talent: probably he would remain a district reporter all his life or else jump to editor-in-chief. Nothing between.

As usual, I was early and he was late. And, as usual, he had a breezy excuse.

The entire scrawny five-feet-six of him came striding into the taproom, grinning and waving, shouting hello to the bartender and a few hangers-on. He pumped my hand, said he'd been tied up on the phone with Councilman Grizzo ("That bastard, can he talk!"), sipped my drink and grimaced, then ordered Scotch on rocks—"and not from that cop's bottle under the bar, you hear, Gus?"

We took our drinks to a table. Dan flipped fingers over his pockets, then snapped them for a cigarette. I shook one from the pack and he lighted up quickly. He came forward on his elbows, smoke jetting from his lips and nostrils.

"Haven't seen you in a dog's age, you long drink of water. A guy gets married he forgets his old pals."

"How many times have I asked you to come over to the apartment?"

"Hell, you know my lousy hours. My goddam editor must think I work best by moonlight. How's the wife? You knock out a kid yet?"

"Not yet," I smiled weakly.

He winked. "Got to use live ammunition, boy. How's the book going?"

"So-so." I didn't like to talk about it and regretted having told him once. Until it was finished, the book belonged only to Ginny and me.

"If I know you, that means it's terrific. Half through?"

"Are you kidding? I'm only on chapter nine."

He looked surprised. "How many more to go?"

"About twenty-five. Maybe thirty. And then I've got to re-write."

"Jesus! That means maybe a year, and then there's no guarantee they'll take it." He shook his head. "You can have it boy, you can have it. Me, I'm not out to break my agates any more. I used to think I was going to write the Great American Novel some day but to hell with that. You know what I'm looking for? Dough, spelt money." He saw I was getting annoyed and he softened it with, "Look, if anyone can make a success of this literary racket, it's you. But I'm talking about *me*. This boy." He pulled a piece of tobacco from his lip. "Paul, I've been thinking. I've got an idea that's going to make you rich and me happy. Interested?"

"I'd like to see you happy," I said.

He took out a copy pencil and poised it over a napkin. "How much do you average a story?"

Nobody asks a business man his income. Publish one story and the first question is, "How much did you make?"

"About a hundred and fifty," I lied.

He jotted it down. He asked how many stories I averaged a month and I answered two. Immediately he used up half the napkin with his calculations. Then, pencil between his teeth, he frowned. "You're not exactly Rockefeller, you know. That's what I mean about breaking your agates for nothing. Why, you've got more brains than ninety-nine per cent of the people in this city and what do you make? Peanuts! Peanuts! Paul, I got an idea that'll make you stand up and dance, honest to God. You'll kick yourself you didn't think of it before. You know what my idea'll do to your income? It'll quadruple it . . . at least. What I'm thinking of is——"

"A writing factory," I cut in quietly.

He frowned, his mouth dropped. "How the hell did you know?"

"It's not exactly a new idea." Many of the fact boys had ghosts

grinding out the material for them; a few, I'd heard, had as many as twelve and fifteen.

Dan scratched his cheek, momentarily deflated. Then he leaned toward me once more. But it still was a good idea, wasn't it? In fact, since it had been proved, that meant it was a goddam good idea. Look, this is the way we'd work it ("I'm including myself, natch"): he would do all the leg-work, the digging out of the facts; I would do the writing since I had the contacts and the "know-how with the words." We'd make an unbeatable combination. Then after he learned the tricks, we'd get someone else to do the leg-work and he would take over part of the writing. Why, the organisation could grow and grow: we'd write one story for a half-dozen magazines; we'd keep files and rewrite old cases from other books; we'd have correspondents throughout the country sending us in newspaper clips: our territory would be from coast to coast.

"Paul, it's Big Business, I'm telling you. And we can do it," he jabbed his chest enthusiastically. "Say we start out small. Say just the two of us. All right. Between us we could knock out two^athree stories a week, no?"

I nodded.

"Okay then. Let's say——" He stopped, forehead wrinkling. "What's the look for?"

"It's not for me, Dan."

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Maybe. But I've got this novel. I'm heading where I want——"

"But you can still do the novel," he interrupted. "Hell, who says you can't? In fact you'll even have more time. I'll be taking over part of the work. And after we get rolling . . . Christ, you won't have much to do at all except make a few marks with a pencil. You'll be bossman. You can play with the literary stuff all you want then."

"You don't get me. I probably could do three of those stories a week myself if I wanted to . . . cut a few corners. But aside from the ethics, Dan, my ambition isn't to become rajah of the fact-detective world."

"Listen to him," he muttered.

"In fact I'm gradually pulling out altogether. I don't think I've done one of those stories in a month. Dan, I'm only doing the ones I have to now, the ones my editor asks for. I'm not looking for more work."

"Okay," he held up hands in despair, "okay do what you want, I'm not arguing. You want to starve in a garret, that's okay with me. But you're screwin' me, you know that, don't you?"

I had to laugh. "You really want to get out of your job bad, don't you?"

"Hell, if I want to work nights I could become a burglar. When do you think I got this idea? Three in the morning, waiting out in the rain for some moneybags to die. You, you stinker, you were my only hope."

"I'm sorry, Dan."

"Sorry, hell. You're paying for the drinks." He waved to the bartender for another.

On the way home I bought a newspaper but didn't look at it until I got inside. A two-column head and a picture of Peter Crisponi riveted my attention immediately.

WIFE HELPED HIM MURDER, DOOMED SLAYER SAYS

Peter Crisponi, 42, to-day accused his wife of helping him slay James Peterson, the 39-year-old insurance agent for whose brutal murder Crisponi faces the electric chair next month.

From his cell in the Northern Penitentiary, police say, Crisponi implicated his 29-year-old wife, Claire, in both the grisly murder and the midnight burial of the body.

According to the police, Crisponi stated that his wife instigated the murder plot and that, after the slaying, she helped drag the dying man out of the car and actually held his legs while Crisponi himself "finished him off with the tyre iron."

The story went on to describe in detail the facts of the murder and the events leading to Crisponi's arrest and first confession. The last two paragraphs related that the police were now in the process of questioning the wife, who was described as a manicurist, and that they hoped to give a full statement within a few days. Although one anonymous "high official" commented that he thought Crisponi's story was "full of holes", there was a

quote from Lieutenant Thompson to the effect that "no possible angle will be overlooked".

Ginny read the story on the bus coming home. It was the first thing she mentioned when she entered.

"Will this affect you in any way?" she asked, worried.

"Why should it? Crisponi doesn't claim he's innocent. He just says his wife was his accomplice. All it means is that my story wasn't too complete, but that really doesn't matter anyway."

"Do you think she's really guilty?"

"It's a little hard to say, isn't it?"

"I don't see why he'd accuse her if she weren't. It'd be a terrible thing."

"You look a little tired, hon."

"Oh——" She started to say something then changed her mind. "I'm really not."

And yet I thought I knew. Ginny rarely complained, but from a few remarks she'd made the past month, I sensed that the frustrations of her work, which once in her raw anger had merely inspired her, were now upsetting her more and more: she wanted to do so much for the people she visited and yet found herself entangled in skeins of red tape; this, and the cold attitudes of many of her fellow workers who "don't look on these people as human beings, Paul, but as cases, ~~as~~ file numbers." She once said she would rather quit than risk the chance of becoming so professionally hard, and I would have wanted her to, for precious to me was her unbruised faith. But I knew also that Ginny would not quit, especially not now when I had cut down on the detective writing and her salary was needed; and it disturbed me.

"Paul," she called from the clothes closet, "I heard from Hillary Craig to-day. Guess what? She's going to have a baby."

"Oh, that's wonderful."

"Isn't it?" She closed the door. "I'm really happy for her. She's wanted one so badly." Her voice grew soft, wistful. "She's wanted one so very, very badly."

And in that moment I learned something else about Ginny.

A few days later the Crisponi case was on the front page once again.

CRISPONI RETRACTS ACCUSATION
OF WIFE

Peter Crisponi, doomed slayer of James Peterson, to-day in a fit of weeping and remorse, retracted his earlier accusation that his wife, Claire, had been his accomplice in murder.

"God forgive me," police say Crisponi said, "for I have sinned enough. I love my wife and don't know why I tried to draw her into this thing."

Police say that their investigation during the past few days had convinced them of the wife's innocence and that when they confronted Crisponi with the lie, he immediately broke down.

Mrs. Crisponi, a manicurist, took her ordeal stoically. She told reporters, "I can't understand why my husband accused me. He must have been temporarily insane. Although it has been trying, I have stood by him in all this trouble. I will stand by him yet. . . ."

The story, once more giving a summary of previous events, went on to say that Crisponi planned no appeal from his death sentence, and he was quoted as telling the investigators that he would go to the electric chair "like a man".

"She sounds like a wonderful woman," Ginny said to me. "How could she possibly stick by him after all this?"

"Buy *Squadcar* at your favourite news-stand next month," I answered cheerlessly.

I knew Davenport would be contacting me soon, for the case as it stood now was exactly the kind he loved. He often used ghost-written stories published under the by-lines of men and women who either were involved innocently in an investigation or whose loved ones had committed some criminal act: stories from which some moral could be drawn so that "others, perhaps you who read, you who some day may be faced with the tragedy that is mine, may benefit from my experience." Mrs. Crisponi's story of her life with her husband, their marriage, the events leading to the murder, her innocent entanglement, would make a perfect woman's by-line for *Squadcar*.

Davenport's call came through early the next morning. I was to offer Mrs. Crisponi fifty dollars for her story—"I see it as a dramatic pulsating human document, don't you?"—but I could

go as high as a hundred and a quarter. He was leaving it to me: "You know how to sell it, Paul, I don't have to tell you. Let me hear from you as soon as you can, won't you?"

That evening, through Ferguson, I learned that Mrs. Crisponi's home was a rooming-house in the slums in the north section of the city. Ferguson was sure she had no telephone but he said I could probably reach her through a public phone.

I debated with myself whether to call Mrs. Crisponi or merely drop in on her. Not knowing what kind of reception I would get, I decided to contact her by phone. Through Information I got the number of a nearby drugstore. The man who answered recognised her name immediately and said he would send a boy. More than five minutes passed.

"Hello." The voice was a woman's and very low and hesitant. It sounded almost sullen.

"Is that Mrs. Crisponi?"

"Who's calling?" Still no change in tone.

I gave my name and told her I was a writer for *Squadcar*. I waited for a reaction. There was none. I felt as if I were talking into a dead phone.

"Can you hear me?"

A long pause. "Who are you?"

I repeated what I'd told her before. Apologising for possibly having disturbed her, I explained that I was interested in writing her story: would she let me see her?

"What do you want to see me for?"

Wearily, "I want to write your story."

"Who are you, a reporter?" Her voice suddenly had taken life.

"No, I'm a magazine writer."

"Oh." Then, "What kind of story do you want? I don't have any story."

"Could I see you and talk it over with you in person?"

". . . I don't know."

"Look, you won't be under any obligation. I'm not a reporter and I'm not going to write down what you tell me. I'd need your permission for that and you'd have to sign a paper for me first. And if you give me the okay, there'll be some money in it for you."

"When do you want to see me?"

"Would tomorrow be all right? Tomorrow morning at your house?" She did not answer and I had to repeat it.

"I guess that's all right."

"That's fine. I'll see you tomorrow then. And thanks a lot for——"

But she had already hung up.

Two rows of brick pierced by doors and four floors of windows lined the street on which I drove slowly, seeking Mrs. Crisponi's rooming-house. Only a few houses had address numbers to mark them, and so I had to count off from the corner until reaching what I assumed to be Mrs. Crisponi's. As I got out of the car carrying my brief-case, a face peered at me from one of the first-floor windows. It seemed to be the face of a fat old man who had nothing to do but sit there and watch the occasional automobile that passed. His gaze followed me up the steps.

The front door was unlocked and the knob juggled loosely. In the foyer I studied the cards above the mailboxes on the cracked marble wall. The name "Crisponi" was written in pencil over an erasure, in a childlike scrawl. Her apartment was on the first floor. The door leading into the corridor was open.

There were only two doors on the first floor, on opposite sides of the hall. At the back was a winding staircase. The wallpaper was yellowish and flaked. I knocked on the door to my left. It was opened by a tall, heavily built middle-aged woman whose grey-black hair fell in curly strings to her shoulders. She had on some kind of sleeveless frock. She wore neither shoes nor stockings and her thick legs were knotted with bluish varicose veins. From the newspaper description I realised this could not be the woman I sought.

"Is Mrs. Crisponi in?"

"She's expectin' you, dearie?"

I nodded and gave my name, which she repeated over her shoulder. Then she opened the door all the way and stepped to one side.

Claire Crisponi was standing by the sofa in a short untidy house-dress. Her hair, tinted red, was in an upsweep, the roots dark. She had a sharp-featured bony face that might have been striking once; a lifelessness tempered it now and made her look older than twenty-nine. She was of average height and rather thin: small-breasted but with provocatively pretty legs that somehow gave her a hard attractiveness. Her eyes were dull, vaguely suspicious of me.

I said, "I'm Mr. Weiler. Remember I called you last night?" I was not at all sure she would.

"You're the reporter." It was a one-toned voice.

"A magazine writer," I corrected.

"Oh," she said.

"You write for them things?" the older woman spoke up brightly.

"That's right. Are you Mrs. Crisponi's mother?"

"Dearie me, no, I'm Mrs. Rockey. I live across the hall." Of the two, she was the more impressed by my vocation. "I'm a good friend of Claire's. Honey," she implored, turning, "have the gentleman sit down."

"You care to sit down?" Mrs. Crisponi said in that same dull voice.

"Thank you. I'll try not to take up too much of your time."

Mrs. Crisponi and her neighbour shared the sofa while I sat across from them on a white kitchen chair, brief-case on my lap. The apartment had a damp odour to it, like that of a seashore house thrown open after the winter. The wallpaper was stained brown in spots, and rain-bloated; there were a few thumb-tacked calendar pictures. The sofa springs and stuffing sagged almost to the floor. One of the green window shades was torn diagonally and patched with cellophane tape. From here had come a murderer, and it seemed no wonder.

I explained what I wanted, finishing with, "It will be the true story, the one that never appeared in the newspapers. It will be the story you'll want the whole world to know."

While Mrs. Crisponi lighted a cigarette and let the blue-grey smoke swirl in her open mouth, I told her ("You know how to sell it," Davenport had said) that in the minds of countless unthinking people there still were doubts of her innocence, even though her husband and the police had cleared her. The way Mrs. Crisponi was looking at me, with eyes half-closed and somewhat puzzled, I could not tell if I had offended her. Then Mrs. Rockey, nodding, said angrily, "That's true, that's true. Some people are like that."

"Of course they are," I said to Mrs. Rockey, "and this will be her chance to clear herself once and for all."

There was a knock on the door and Mrs. Rockey went to open it. A man on crutches swung himself into the room. I recognised him as the one I had seen looking out the window, although I realised now that he was only in his middle twenties. He had a round fat face with pimples on his cheeks and chin.

His shirt collar was open and the fold of his neck and the v of his chest were red and sweaty as he worked himself laboriously forward. The zipper on his fly was pulled down a little and his stomach was a bulge of fat that sucked in his trousers at the crotch. His buttocks strained against his pants. Both his legs were limp and useless. He manoeuvred himself to the sofa, took the crutches from under his arms, held them together and then pivoted and landed heavily on the cushion.

"I want you to meet my son John," said Mrs. Rockey.

I shook his hand. His grip was loose and damp. While Mrs. Rockey leaned his crutches against the wall, she said, "Mr. Weiler is one of them magazine writers, John. He's come to get Claire's story." John settled back. Mrs. Rockey sat on one of the other wooden chairs, hands folded on her ample lap.

Facing Mrs. Crisponi again, trying to break through the shell that encased her, I said, "It's going to be a story you'll be proud of, I promise you that."

She flicked ash into a tray, looked solemn and said nothing.

"I mean that sincerely, Mrs. Crisponi. I'm not here to hurt you. Try to believe me. You've been hurt enough. I want to be your friend. Let me do your story and I know you'll always think of me as a friend."

Her gaze flickered to Mrs. Rockey, then back: "What do I have to do?"

"It's just a matter of answering the questions I ask you. It shouldn't take more than an hour."

"How do I know what you'll write? I know you reporters."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll let you read it when I'm finished. If you don't like it then it's no go." This was something I disliked doing, for I had had the experience of by-liners peremptorily changing their minds after I had completed a piece. Yet, realising how much Davenport wanted this story, I was willing to take the chance.

But Mrs. Crisponi still was suspicious. Squeezing out her cigarette, "You can tell me anything now."

"You have witnesses here, don't you? If I don't stick to my word you can sue."

"Yeah." She sniffed.

"You really don't have nothin' to lose, Claire," said Mrs. Rockey.

"You have to use my real name?" Mrs. Crisponi asked.

"If I don't the whole thing loses its value. There'd be no story then."

"Sure, the whole thing's your name, honey," Mrs. Rockey said. She obviously relished the role of interlocutor she had assumed. To me, "This is goin' to be like one of them confession stories, ain't it?"

"Well——" I began, not knowing what to say. I wasn't sure if the comparison would be to my advantage.

"Oh, I read those books," Mrs. Crisponi interjected. There was a little more brightness in her voice: I realised she probably considered them literature.

"It'll be better than those stories."

"Claire in a magazine," Mrs. Rockey smiled, shaking her head.

Mrs. Crisponi fumbled for a cigarette in a crumpled pack. She took one out that was twisted and bent. Carefully she straightened it between her fingers.

"And you're going to be paid for it," I said.

Her eyes shot up. "How much?"

"Oh——" I thought as I drew out the word. Usually I started off with the lowest figure, but the poverty here, Mrs. Crisponi's obvious need for money, prompted me to offer her the hundred and twenty-five right off.

The two women studied each other. Mrs. Crisponi shrugged. Mrs. Rockey said, "Can't you do no better?"

"I can't, honestly. That's all I've been authorised to pay."

"Claire needs the money somethin' awful. Can't you just a little?"

Davenport, I knew, wouldn't go above his top price, and ordinarily I would never have considered raising it on my own. But the wretchedness of the surroundings, the tragedy of Mrs. Crisponi's life that was reflected in her dark doubting eyes, prompted me to make it two hundred. I explained that the extra seventy-five dollars would be coming out of my pocket, which was true, but that I was doing it because of her financial situation and also because I felt that her story was one that should be told—which was a point I unconsciously had managed to sell myself.

"What do you say, Claire?" Mrs. Rockey questioned. She was eager.

"I don't know. What do you say?"

"He looks like a very nice gentleman."

"You promise you'll let me read it first?"

"You've got my word," I said. Already I had opened my brief-case and taken out the form which she would have to sign. It was little more than a granting of permission for *Squadcar* to use her name. Mrs. Crisponi read it through slowly, then again. She was beginning to irritate me. I looked at Mrs. Rockey and she smiled pleasantly and I had to smile back. John Rockey was breathing heavily through parted lips. Mrs. Crisponi questioned me about a few obvious points on the form: she deliberated over everything. Even the signing of her name took concentration.

I arranged a batch of yellow paper on the brief-case on my lap. With my finger I tested the pencil point, made a few scribbles on the paper.

"I'm not a very good talker," Mrs. Crisponi warned.

Her story did not come easily and I had to prod her with questions to push it along. She smoked incessantly and often consulted with Mrs. Rockey on some point. What I was after were human interest anecdotes; and where Mrs. Crisponi had the tendency to skim over events that appeared to have substance, I had to make her go back and dig deeper into her memory. Thinking pained her. I wanted drama, tragedy, suspense, pathos. And occasionally in my notes I would harmlessly embellish a few dry facts that might have happened the way our readers preferred.

Mrs. Crisponi's maiden name was Pitts and she was born in Canton, Ohio. She was the eldest of six children. Her father died when she was eleven and she and a brother were sent to live with an uncle and aunt in Chicago. Her relatives were poor and she had to quit high school after the first year and go to work in a pyjama factory. (Notes: "Hated to leave school . . . excellent student . . . felt obl. help relatives . . . worked hard, no time pleasure . . . used like to read.") She met Peter Crisponi when she was eighteen. He was thirty-one at the time and they had met at a carnival where he operated a balloon-and-dart concession. (Notes: "Love 1st sight . . . he gave her doll even though she lost . . . asked see her later . . . he good-looking, kind.") They were married two days later and she left on the carnival tour with him. (Notes: "Happiness . . . real happns . . . first time in life.")

About two years after their marriage, Crisponi changed in a way that frightened and dismayed her. He began drinking and

gambling heavily. He chased around with other women. (Notes: "She wanted a family, home . . . clung on . . . faith . . . just hoping for best.") She used to beg him to leave the carnival and settle down, but he refused to listen. Then one day he got into a drunken brawl with the "patch", the carny whose job was to make the necessary arrangements with the police of each town, and broke the patch's jaw; as a result he was fired. (Notes: "Play up fight. Make dramatic. She weeping, try tear them apart.") He went to work for another carnival but had a fight there also, this time with a roustabout: fired again, he found himself blacklisted among carnival owners. The Crisponis moved to Miami Beach where he got a job in a hotel kitchen. He kept gambling away his wages and she took a job as a manicurist. After the winter season they moved to this city, where Crisponi had relatives. He worked for a while as a trucker's helper but eventually was fired for drinking.

"Then," said Claire Crisponi, "he went on relief. A million jobs around and he went on relief."

"Did you work?"

"A little while. Then I got pregnant and had a miscarriage and I wasn't the same after. I'm still not too good."

(Notes: "Work up hospital scene, grief over baby, love of childrn.")

"Did he still keep running around?"

She nodded.

"Did he ever hit you?"

She shifted her gaze to Mrs. Rockey.

"He used to beat her up somethin' awful," the neighbour spoke up. "I used to want to call the police but Claire she never let me. Pete was a funny guy. He could be so sweet one minute you'd want to hug him, but just let him get a couple drinks in him and he was a tiger. Not to me, mind you, but to Claire. He's in enough trouble, but if he'd been my man and hit me like that, I'd have conked him, honest to Christ. But Claire here she's got the patience of a saint. She don't complain . . . nothin'. You loved him somethin' awful, didn't you, honey?"

Claire lighted another cigarette, blew out the match and stared at it silently.

"Was your husband acting strange any time before the murder?" I asked.

"I don't think so." She looked at Mrs. Rockey. "You think so, Stella?"

"He seemed the same to me. This thing came as a terrible surprise, mister."

I said, "They arrested him here at the house, didn't they, Mrs. Crispogni?"

"That's right."

"Can you describe your reaction?"

"I was scared, if that's what you mean."

"Did you faint?"

"No."

"Cry?"

"Did I cry, Stella?"

"The poor darling was too dazed to cry," Mrs. Rockey said. "She walked around here in a daze for weeks. She's still not out of it. I don't know how she holds up."

(Notes: "Almost fainted . . . wept bitrly . . . couldn't believe . . . throw it all in, plus.")

"Do you have any idea why your husband tried to implicate you in the murder?"

"I don't know. I can't figure it. I just got a letter from him yesterday. He says he's sorry and that he must have been crazy to try to mix me up in it."

"Can I see the letter?"

"It's not too much."

"Let him see it, honey," Mrs. Rockey said. "You got nothin' to be ashamed of."

Mrs. Crispogni went into the bedroom and brought it out for me. The letter was written in pencil on lined paper. I copied it exactly.

Dear Claire,

I am writing this in the hope that you will forgive me for what I have done. I don't know why I tried to drag you into it but I must have been crazy at the time. This place can drive you nuts and so all I can say is I'm sorry and ask your forgiveness. Will you answer me? I love you so much. You are with me every minute of the day and night. I kiss you and hold you in my thoughts all the time. Sometimes I am scared because it's an awful thing knowing there's no way out and that you won't wake up and find it's only a dream after all. Try to remember me and think of me in a good way, like I think of you, way back in the past when we were so happy. Forgive as you would have others forgive you. That's something

I read somewhere and it's true. I've been reading the Bible a lot so that's probably where I saw it. Claire, I love you. Please answer this letter, please darling.

Love,

Your loving husband PETE

X X X

"Do you?" I asked, handing back the letter.

"Do I what?" Mrs. Crisponi frowned.

"Forgive him."

Mrs. Rockey answered for her. "He don't deserve it, not after what he's done to her." And Mrs. Crisponi looked at her and said nothing. Just then John Rockey reached for his crutches. He held them together and with one hand on the arm of the sofa, managed to raise himself. We watched as he swung himself wordlessly out of the room. He had said nothing all the time he'd been here.

(Notes: "Forgives . . . clings to luv despt terrible crime.")

"Have you seen your husband in prison?" I asked then.

"No."

"Do you intend to?"

Her shoulders moved up and down.

"I wouldn't let her go," Mrs. Rockey said savagely. "Her nerves are bad enough. They're like this——" and she shook her hand in the air.

I drew a thick line on the paper, indicating to myself that I had the body of the story. Then I told Mrs. Crisponi that I would like to borrow some snapshots of her and her husband. She was hesitant until Mrs. Rockey convinced her they were necessary to the story, and I had to promise I would return them as soon as I had them copied. She gave me the only two pictures she had. One had been taken at an amusement arcade in Florida, and it showed the Crisponis against a backdrop of painted palm trees, laughing with their heads together: "The Crisponis in happier days," the caption probably would read. The other was a snapshot of Crisponi himself, posed in front of a carnival stand and holding a kewpie doll: "Instead of a doll, one day a lethal weapon." It was hard to think of this man with the easy-going smile as a murderer.

I told Mrs. Crisponi that I hoped to start on the story right away and that she could expect to hear from me again

within a day or two. At the door I remembered one other question.

"What are your plans for the future, Mrs. Crisponi?"

"I don't know," she answered tonelessly.

I unzipped my brief-case. (*Notes*: "Will have to get job . . . has to live . . . will never forget . . . must find happiness somewhere . . . doubts ever luv again.")

CHAPTER NINE

THAT afternoon I began Claire Crisponi's story. I barely had to outline it in my mind, for it would follow a general pattern I had used many times before. Into the typewriter roller went two pieces of paper and a carbon. As usual I would not bother with a rough draft. Typing my name and address in the top left-hand corner, I tried to think of a title, even though I realised Davenport probably would use one of his own. I thought of several, discarding them immediately as being too subtle or hammy. Now I had one which did not seem too bad: *too* bad. Although I loathed starting, once I went to work it was with an all-consuming intensity which, unless I were interrupted, would carry me well into the body of the story within a few hours.

"MURDERER!"—THE MAN I MARRIED

By CLAIRE CRISPONI

"Murderer!"—That is what they call my husband!

"Murderer!"—That is what my husband called me!

Most of you, I am certain, know my name. You have read it in the newspapers; and many of you, undoubtedly, think of it only in doubt and scorn.

My husband is Peter Crisponi, the man who shot and bludgeoned James Peterson to death. I need not try to hide the horror of his crime, for his own lips admitted it. I cannot hide it from myself, for neither by day nor night has it ever been out of my mind.

I am telling the story of my life with Peter Crisponi for several reasons. First, and probably most important, I want to clear my name in the minds of those of you who still think me guilty. Second, I want you, the readers of *Squadcar Detective Magazine*, to know how it feels to learn that the one you love

is a killer. Most of you, perhaps, think it could never happen to you. You think it happens only to someone in a different state, or another part of the city; to anyone but yourself.

Once I used to think that way.

Oh, how different are my thoughts today!

I loved Peter Crisponi. I loved him with all my heart and all my soul. I loved him with all the fierce devotion a woman can give to a man. And he returned that love with murder!

But it was not always so. When I first met Peter Crisponi, he was the kindest and gentlest person who had ever come into my life. My father died when I was eleven and I was sent with a brother to live with relatives in Chicago. . . .

I went on to describe with thick buttery slabs of emotion her life with her relatives ("Things were hard, mine was a childless childhood") and then how she met the man who was to be her husband ("I loved his laugh, it was a hearty deep-throated thing"). I told of those first years ("We had good times together, we were like a couple of crazy lovesick kids") and then of the gradual change in him ("Lonely . . . lonely were those nights, and I would cry bitterly") and how she clung on ("He was my man!") in the hope that they would find happiness together again ("I wanted a family, I wanted my own home. Everything within me ached for the things that every girl craves. Yet all I got was—heartache!").

I finished the story the next morning. Reading it, I found the surplus of melodrama a little hard to take, but there was no doubt in my mind Davenport would buy it. My only worry was if Mrs. Crisponi would like it, but I could see no reason why not. If anything, I had flattered her: I had turned her from a drab shallow person into a woman of warmth and sensitivity, one to be pitied for the pathos of her life and to be admired for her courage against a hostile world.

That afternoon I took the story to her, I waited until she read it and it took her three cigarettes to get through thirty pages. Finished, her only comment was a begrudging, "Brother, you sure got a good imagination."

Davenport's voice was vibrant with emotion. My Crisponi story, said he, was a "modern classic".

"Why, you've made Mrs. Crisponi spring alive from the paper. She isn't a thing of words. She's a three-dimensional human being, warm, inspiring, courageous. Heroic is the word. She's the kind of perfectly credible person any number of our readers can identify themselves with. And like I've always told you, Paul, reader-identification is important, it's *the* thing. *Now*." He waited until the "now" had effect. "Paul, I've got a job for you."

Worried, "What's that, Howard?"

"Paul, it's an idea that's been bouncing around my head ever since I put down your story. I'm all excited about it and I couldn't wait to talk it over with you. What I'm thinking about is a little touch that will make your story even more sensational a human study. Just one little touch . . . and I know you can do it for me. Paul, *I want Mrs. Crisponi's reaction on the night her husband goes to the chair!*"

Oh, *hell!* Wouldn't I ever be through with the story?

"What do you think of that, my boy?" his excited voice intruded.

"It sounds good to me," I said unhappily.

"Good? It's sensational! Paul, we'll have a story there that'll make the competition bust their buttons with envy. The drama of that death night, the tenseness, the grim suspense . . . can you picture it? And all seen through the tortured eyes of the doomed man's wife! If that doesn't sell magazines I don't know what will." A breathless pause. "The execution is Tuesday of next week, isn't it?"

"That's right."

"Copy by Thursday?"

"Well, I'll have to see her Wednesday and——"

"Wednesday? No sirree sir, Paul. Tuesday night. That's what I mean. You be there, I want you to be with her, to see for yourself."

I went cold. Could he actually mean this? "I don't know if she'd go for it. After all it's an intrusion and——"

"She may not, I realise. But I'd like you to try."

"Couldn't I talk to her later? Or even just write it without——"

"Paul," he chided, displeased, "that doesn't sound like you."

"I was just saying," I said apprehensively.

His voice lost its sternness; he became the salesman again. "You know what keeps *Squadcar* on top of the pack, don't you? *Reality!* Reality, Paul, the thing the discerning reader can feel

in a flash. Sure, anyone could make up that death night scene. That's what the competition would do. But don't think the reader, that discerning reader, the reader *Squadcar* hits, would be fooled for one minute. They'd feel let down. Paul, we've got the chance here to do something terrific. Your being there . . . you could write a masterpiece of description as only you can do. The ticking clock maybe. The hands coming close to the hour. The agony on Mrs. Crisponi's face, what she says, her gestures, her pacing the floor perhaps. It could be a knockout. And it would be *real*. Paul," he said crisply, "I want it! I want you to get it for me!" Then, as was his way after hammering home a point, he changed the subject abruptly. "And how's the little wife?"

"She's fine."

"Good. Keep in touch, won't you?"

I felt like banging down the receiver; I didn't though. How could I go through with this? Always before in my detective writing I had gone to work after the tragedy, not during: I had never been at the centre of its flow. Things always had happened and were not happening. But here with Mrs. Crisponi, instead of being an impersonal recorder, I would be at the very heart-roots of tragedy, and the thought curdled my conscience. But what could I do? Should I write the scene from my imagination? It would be simple and probably Mrs. Crisponi would not care. A temptation. But what if Davenport ever found out?

I kept putting off the decision from day to day. I never mentioned it to Ginny. Not only would the assignment outrage her sensibilities but I was aware also that she had vague fears of danger connected with my work.

For reasons that had nothing to do with Crisponi as a person, my hope was that the man would win a reprieve. But that Monday there was a story in the papers saying that he planned no appeal from his sentence. I wavered all that day, finally deciding in the lonesomeness of night that nothing could make me go through with it.

The following morning a telegram came.

DEAR PAUL

UPSTAIRS EXCITED ABOUT PROSPECTS. I KNOW YOU WILL
DO YOUR BEST FOR ME. HOLDING STORY UNTIL WORD FROM
YOU. GOOD LUCK

HOWARD

Completely confused again, I sat at my desk, the telegram before me. How could I possibly deceive the man after he had been so good to me?

Fingers coiled in my hair: but what excuse, what excuse could I give Mrs. Crisponi for stopping over?

Twice I drove past Mrs. Crisponi's house before gathering nerve enough to stop. The shades were drawn both in her window and the Rockeys', but light glowed within, dissipating my hope that she would not be home. It was a warm dark early-April night. The street was quiet. Even the few youths clustered outside the dusty-windowed Hoagie shop at the corner were strangely quiet. Emotionally in tumult, I walked up the steps, still trying to think out my story. I rapped on Mrs. Crisponi's door. There was silence and now the soft pad of footsteps. The door creaked open. Mrs. Crisponi's face appeared, and slowly her whole body. Holding the knob in her left hand, she looked at me without expression: she might never have seen me before in her life.

"I was . . . in the neighbourhood," I said, "And I had something for you and I thought . . . I'd drop in. If I'm intruding don't hesitate to tell me. May I . . . come in?"

"Sure." Shrugging, she stepped to one side and closed the door behind me. Immediately she bent for a cigarette. Her hair was piled in reddish thickness on her head and she was wearing slacks, a polo shirt and coloured straw-like wedgies. Her face seemed even thinner, bonier.

"I've got your pictures," I said, removing them from an envelope. "I told you I'd return them in good condition, didn't I?"

Glancing at them casually, she put them face down on the arm of the sofa.

"You got the cheque from the magazine, of course," I said.

"You told me it'd be for two hundred," she said.

"Don't you remember I told you seventy-five would come from me? Did you think I'd go back on my word?"

"How would I know?"

"And here," I smiled, "I thought you trusted me."

"Brother, in this world——" But she didn't finish the thought.

I sat on the sofa, cheque book on my lap. After I handed

the cheque to her, she scrutinised it carefully and folded it crisply between long pale fingernails. She set it on top of the pictures, drew in on her cigarette and looked like she might cry.

"I'm terribly sorry," I said awkwardly but with deep feeling.

"Don't be." She blinked and her face hardened.

"You're a strange person, you know that?"

Suspiciously, "Why? You think I'm crazy?"

"No, I think you're very brave and I admire you for it."

"Yeah." She sat on one of the wood chairs, crossed her legs and held her cigarette over a cupped hand.

"I mean that sincerely." And I did. "You're a very brave woman, Mrs. Crisponi."

"Christ," she said suddenly, "stop feeling sorry for me! I can't stand people feeling sorry for me!"

I flushed. "I didn't mean it that way at all."

"Oh, don't mind me," she said irritably.

"You have been knocked around terribly, haven't you?"

She said nothing. I pulled out a cigarette. My fingers were cold. What was I doing here? This woman, so bitterly alone in this shabby flat, her husband on death row and the time growing short . . . by what right was I here?

I said, "Do you think of me as a friend?"

She shrugged. "Sure, why not?"

"I mean as a good friend. I'd like to be. If there's any way I can help you——"

"There's nothing you can do for me."

"Now or the future. Any time. I don't know what I can do but if there's anything, believe me——"

She nodded in acknowledgment.

"Are you going to be alone tonight?"

"I guess."

"Where's Mrs. Rocky?"

"She's in bed. She's got a sore throat and fever. I don't want to bother her with my troubles."

"Would you like me to stay?"

"What would you want to do that for?" Suspicion edged with wonder.

"I don't want you to be alone." This had become the truth. Pity for this woman made me forget about Davenport, the story.

"I'm not scared," she said.

"You shouldn't be alone. And I'd like to stay . . . if you want me."

"It's okay with me," she shrugged. "But I'm not such hot company," she warned, grinding out her cigarette. She looked up, "You want a drink?"

"Do you?"

"I guess I could stand one."

She went into the kitchen. The bottle she brought back had only a thin line of whisky in it, which she swirled around. "You can get a good drunk on this, can't you?"

"Can I buy something?"

"You want to?" Her teeth showed as she thought. "There's a package store about two blocks down the street."

I got up. "What would you like?"

"Anything," Mrs. Crisponi said.

I went out to the car. The liquor store shades were just being drawn as I pulled up at the kerb. The door was still unlocked, though. I bought a bottle of rye, then stopped at a drugstore and bought two bottles of ginger ale. It was almost nine-thirty by the time I got back. Mrs. Crisponi had set glasses on one of the wood chairs in the living-room. The ginger ale was warm and I cracked some ice.

We sat on the sofa, the bottles and glasses on the chair in front of us. I filled a shot glass for Mrs. Crisponi. She wanted hers straight. I mixed mine and held it up.

"I want to wish you happiness," I said. "May you know only happiness from now on."

She looked at me over her glass and then took a sip which she followed with water. She set down the glass and lighted a cigarette, balancing it on the edge of the chair. A sip, water, a drag on the cigarette: it was a routine with her. For a time neither of us spoke. I wondered what she was thinking. It seemed almost sacrilegious to intrude on her thoughts.

Then she said, "What time's it supposed to happen?" She was sitting back, eyes completely blank.

My hand tightened involuntarily around the glass. I dared not look at her. "Eleven o'clock," I said.

"I wonder if it hurts," she said in that same even voice.

I couldn't answer. I wanted to comfort her, yet I couldn't answer.

"Pete was always a sissy," she said. "He was always taking

things, aspirins, pills, things like that. He was always afraid he was getting sick, and in the rain he'd wear rubbers." She came forward and took hold of the bottle. Her head turned toward me. "I should cry, shouldn't I? All day I been telling myself I should cry. And yet I can't." She filled her glass.

"A person can cry only so much," I said.

"I haven't cried at all," she said, staring at me.

The door opened and I turned. John Rockey was in the doorway, leaning forward heavily on his crutches, wide patches of dark sweat staining his shirt at the armpits. He looked at Mrs. Crisponi fixedly, his pimply face blood-mottled. He ignored me entirely.

"How's Stella?" Mrs. Crisponi asked.

"She wanted me to find out how you're doin'," he mumbled. He pivoted slowly and with great care worked himself out to the hall. Mrs. Crisponi got up to close the door.

"I don't think he likes me," I said when she was seated again.

"Johnny just don't talk much."

We sat for a long time in silence. My heart seemed to be ticking off the minutes. I thought of Peter Crisponi and of what Lieutenant Thompson had written and I applied it to the man who was the husband of this woman here. It was terrifying. Mrs. Crisponi was drinking heavily. She was on her fifth by the time I finished my second. A veined glow had appeared on her cheek-bones and in the yellowish, shadowed light of the room her face was like tinted concrete.

"Is it wrong," she said, not looking at me, "that I can't cry?"

"It isn't wrong," I said. "There comes a time when a person's suffered so much they just can't cry."

She turned, studying me before speaking. "I like the way you talk. You talk real nice. You talk like a gentleman."

"I'm only saying what I feel, Mrs. Crisponi."

"You talk refined," she went on. "You can tell you've been to college." She turned away again. "Why should I cry? What'd he ever do good for me? I worked my fingers to nothing for him. He was always mean to me, he never bought me nothing, he never took me nowhere. I was always wearing rags and looking after him. He never bought me a new dress, he never cared how I looked. He was too busy drinking and when I'd

say something he'd hit me. He was always using——" she was a little high and groped for dignified, proper words—"he was always using foul language. I always hated foul language. Why should I cry?" Suddenly she buried her face in her hands. Instinctively I moved over and touched her shoulder.

She looked up slowly. Her face had changed expression subtly. It had become soft, eyes wide, lips apart. There was something sinuous about her.

"You've been real nice to me," she said in a thin voice.

My heart lurched hotly.

"You've got kind eyes," she said. She put her head against my chest. "My, your heart's pounding," she said.

I did not want to and yet my arms went around her. Her body began to tremble against me. I'd long forgotten there could be such a trembling. Suddenly I pulled back and stood up. She glared at me from the sofa, chest heaving.

"Don't flatter yourself," she said, out of breath. "If you think it was you, you're crazy."

"I don't think anything." My own voice sounded far away; it might have belonged to someone else.

"I'm just lonely," she said. "Haven't you ever been lonely?"

"Yes," I said thickly, "I've been lonely."

"Haven't you ever been so lonely you could scream?" She stood up, her eyes never leaving me. "Haven't you ever been so lonely you wanted to die?" Her face became hard again, her eyes flared. "But you're a gentleman, you're too good for me!"

"Mrs. Crisponi, please——"

"You're used to fancy show girls maybe. Maybe them models. Maybe I ain't pretty enough." She whirled and faced the cracked mirror over the sofa. She began pulling out hairpins and throwing them to the floor. She shook her hair loose. It fell languidly to her shoulders. She turned. Her eyes, green and deep, had sprung alive cat-like. She ran her hands down her hips.

"You can leave," she said. "Any time you want you can leave."

My heart and blood rioted within me.

"I can make your toes wiggle," she said. "I can make you squirm."

"You're a bitch," I said.

She smiled tauntingly.

"You're a no-good bitch," I said.

"Any time you want you can leave."

I grabbed her by the arms and swung her close. She looked up, her face filled with mocking laughter. Her arms slid around me. They were cool on my neck. Her fingernails thrilled my scalp. She buried her face against me.

"Squeeze my shoulders," she breathed.

"How?"

"With your fingers."

"Like this?"

"Yeah . . . yeah. Harder. Make it hurt!" She let out a groan of exquisite pleasure and raised her face and dug her lips violently against mine. Her body writhed, it could not remain still. She unbuttoned my shirt. Her fingers trickled around my flesh. Fingernails dug into my back. She bit my lip.

"Door," she whispered hoarsely, "we gotta lock the door."

She sprang for it, turned the key slowly so that the lock clicked noiselessly. Then she leaned her back against the door, arms by her sides. Her eyes were on me. She came away, wetting her lips, and raised her arms over her head, wrists close. I tugged at her polo shirt. She curved her body to help.

In bed, hers was a passion almost insatiate; and with her that night all the wild mute struggling emotions that had been pent up within me for so long suddenly found their tongues and frenzied release. The furnace doors to my soul were thrown open and every inhibition became molten. Her breath was the roar of oceans in my ear, the wild winds. She was a hundred moist hungry lips, a thousand tongues. Moaning, whimpering, cajoling, she led me through the labyrinth of passions. She urged me on, then bade me linger; she cautioned only to beckon again. We were a symphony of drums. Never end, oh never end, never, never end!

And done.

Apart immediately and I covered my face with a crooked arm. I could feel the bed sag as she left. Suddenly I did not want to look at her, to gaze upon reality. I wanted to keep my eyes darkened for ever.

"You sick or something?"

She was sitting by the bureau, half-naked and smoking. Her face was the masked thing again I'd always known. She came over

and sat next to me. She offered me a drag from her cigarette. I shook my head.

Without looking at me she said, "Who's this Ginny?"

I raised myself. "How do you know that name?"

"That's what you called me once, remember?"

I fell back limply. Between her body and left arm I could see the clock on the bureau. Its hands pointed to ten after eleven.

CHAPTER TEN

I DROVE home in a daze along dark streets. Everything had happened so swiftly, so completely without warning, it was as though it could not have happened at all. I felt unclean, crusted with dirt, crawling with worms. I loathed Claire Crisponi, yet no more than I loathed myself. Why had I let myself go like that? Why? Why? The many half-forgotten things I had said to her in passion came back sharply, causing everything to draw up within me: rot, filth, sewage, all of it! How could I go home? How could I share the same bed with Ginny? Ginny! I recalled what I had told her once, about all the things I wanted out of marriage, my desire for the beautiful and the perfect, my scorn for those men who cheated. It all seemed so terribly pathetic now.

Ginny was asleep. I was thankful for that. Closing the bathroom door quietly, I pulled off my clothes. I let the water run slowly, trying to scrub myself noiselessly yet thoroughly clean. The kisses stuck pastily to my skin. I took a bottle of rubbing alcohol from the closet and noticed in the mirror the long pink fingernail trails on my shoulders and back. Cain could not have been more branded. I drew on pyjamas quickly. Unclean!

Carefully I eased myself into bed. Ginny stirred. I drew the covers over me. I felt panicky and did not want to look at her.

"What time is it, Paul?" she asked sleepily.

"A little after twelve."

"That late?"

"You go to sleep now. I'll talk to you in the morning."

She was fixing her pillow, patting and fluffing it. "Where were you so late?"

"Ginny, I'm tired, please."

"Who was she, Paul?"

I whirled around. She was smiling. I lay back. "What made you say a stupid thing like that?"

"Because I'm not sleepy any more and I feel like talking. Can't I tease you?"

"I was with a cop. I got a story."

"Oh, not another one! Did you work on the book today?"

"A little."

"Remember that scene you wrote about the party? Well. I was thinking today——"

"Ginny, please, I'm tired."

"Paul, what's the matter?"

"Cut it out, won't you? Just because I'm sleepy does something have to be the matter?"

"You're so sharp with me."

"I apologise. On my knees I apologise."

She kissed my cheek. Self-hatred made my skin crawl. I did not deserve her kiss and wanted to scratch out the spot with my nails.

"You're an old grouch, you know that?" she said. Then, "Aren't you going to kiss me good-night?"

I leaned over and kissed her quickly on the lips. She snuggled close. "Good night, Paul."

I did not answer.

There was no sleep in me and after about an hour I got out of bed and went to the window. I sat on the radiator, arms folded around one upraised knee. The street was oppressively quiet. The bed creaked behind me.

"Paul, don't you feel well?"

"I just can't sleep."

"Come here to me."

I walked back. I lay next to her. Suddenly it was such a comfort being near her.

"I think you're working too hard," she said. "Your mind's so active you can't sleep."

"I . . . I don't mind working hard."

"I know you don't but maybe you ought to take it easy for awhile . . . Honey?"

"Yes, Ginny."

"Do you still love me as much as ever?"

I threw myself against her and her arms encircled me. There was a groaning within me as if my soul were crying out. I never wanted her to let me go.

"Ginny——" it was a sudden thought and I drew back—

"Ginny, let's go way somewhere."

Elated, "Do you really mean that?"

"I never meant it more. Let's go somewhere where we can

forget everything and just be together. Some place lonely and beautiful where we won't want to think of anything but each other."

"Oh, it sounds like a dream."

"Have you ever been to Cape Cod?"

She shook her head.

"Look——" I was breathless with the idea and talking with my hands—"it's a little early, it's not the season, but what's the difference! We'll go to the tip of the Cape, we'll go to Provincetown. You'll love Provincetown."

Excitedly she wanted to know what it was like and I described with enthusiastic gestures that curved finger of land, two quaint parallel streets in breadth, stretching out between bay and ocean as though from the world itself, with its picturesque Old World atmosphere, its fairy-tale shops, its wild sand dunes. I told her about the fishing boats coming in at sunset and the olive-skinned boys diving off the wharf at night for amusement and coins; about the artists and writers who went there to work and play; about Race Point with its lighthouse and vast lonely beauty. We could rent a cottage on the beach, surely we'd find a cottage even now, and when it grew warm we could swim in front of the door or just lie on the sand in the bright sun. We could sail in Provincetown Harbour; we could fish from the beach at night, knee-deep in the dark water and the lines swishing out, or in a boat by day. And there was one place above all where we had to go.

"Tell me about it." She was like a happy child, eager for a story.

To me this place was the most beautiful spot in the world. A boy friend and I had come upon it accidentally. Near Wellfleet, out of curiosity, we had turned our car off the main road and into a narrow rutted lane that twisted and coiled through a lake-dotted forest until, about three miles in, we could go no farther because we had come upon sand. Getting out of the car, we walked up a slight incline and there before us was a sight of such magnificence, of such solitary grandeur, that we felt we had intruded upon some sacred and mystic land. We were on a cliff and below was a wide ribbon of clean empty beach, unmarred by footprints for miles on either side, and lapped by a quiet unruffled blue-green sea. Shells, a few sand birds skittering back and forth with the curls of the ocean, and the beach with the cliff to hide and shelter it; these and the sky-dome

and that was all. We stood there quietly, as if it would be a wrong and terrible thing to move or speak, as if with the sound of our voices the entire fragile scene would crumble. Then almost with one movement we slid down the sandy cliff. Then we ran back and forth, yelling and shouting, more to prove this place real than anything else. Then we took off our clothes and plunged naked into the water.

"In all the hours we were there," I said, "not another person appeared. Perhaps no one has been there since. Perhaps it's just waiting for us."

"Do you think you could find it again?" she asked, stirred.

"I have to find it again."

"Paul, it sounds so beautiful."

"Do you know what I'd want to do there on the beach, Ginny?"

"What, darling?"

"I'd want to make love to you. You'd let me make love to you there, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, I think I'd want you to!"

"It would be so wonderful and clean and beautiful that way, wouldn't it? Just you and I and the ocean and sand and sky."

"Hmmm," she murmured, closing her eyes. Unconsciously I had reached something within her. What I offered was the ethereal. It skimmed the realities and where it brushed them it only purified. The truths, the mechanics of sex, made her diffident; she could lose that diffidence in a dream. In dreams she could be a wonderful wanton, and perhaps was. But I did not know this then, and merely groped.

"I'd like to leave as soon as I clean up a few things," I said.

"I must get fired," she answered.

"Then you'll get fired, so what! Maybe we'll never come back."

"Darling, I'm so happy! You'll finish the book there, you'll do wonderful things. We'll . . . Paul——" she stopped suddenly and her fingers were in my hair again—"I don't mean now, but some day. You'll want children, won't you?"

"Of course, honey."

"Do you know what I'd want first?"

"First, eh?"

"Yes, *you*." She made a face, then smiled and went on dreamily. "I'd want a little girl first. I never used to think I'd want a girl. I used to think I'd be afraid to bring a girl into

this world. But now I do. I'd want her to be so beautiful and I'd dress her pretty and she'd wear ribbons. And I think I'd be a good mother. I think I'd know exactly how to raise her."

I slid under the cover next to her. She came close and we talked on and on, sleepily after a while, about our plans, our beautiful future. Then she yawned and I yawned and we kept on talking until we couldn't keep our eyes open any longer. The world had become a wonderful fuzzy place. Sleep came easily.

A man was murdered in the city that same night. Harry Mangus, an elderly hardware store proprietor, was found with a bullet in his back, sprawled on the floor near his open but untouched cash register. Davenport wired me as soon as it hit the New York papers.

DEAR PAUL

ASSUME YOU'RE GIVING MANGUS TOP PRIORITY. LOOKS MEATY FROM HERE. FINGERS CROSSED IT BREAKS THE DEADLINE

A few hours after the telegram arrived, the case was solved; and from the newspaper accounts I saw that it was nothing for *Squadcar*. The killer was a Negro and while Davenport was one of the very few editors who occasionally would use a crime in which one—not two—of the principals was coloured, the case had to be, in his own words, "super sensational". And the Mangus case actually was open and shut. A woman standing across the street from the hardware store had heard the shot and as the killer had jumped into a car parked at the corner, she had jotted down the licence number. The papers said that the accused killer, a nineteen-year-old boy named George Van-Porter had confessed the murder, claiming he had intended merely to rob Mangus but had shot the old man when he thought he was reaching for a revolver.

I wondered if I should call Detective Ferguson to see if there were any unpublished facts behind the investigation that would save it as a story, but I decided against it. The Crisponi piece was my sale for the month and I had no pressing need for money. I called Davenport and made my report. Since the case was weak all around, he dismissed it lightly. He asked though for the execution-night scene which, not only had I

been unable to write but which I purposely had tried to shut from my mind.

"The production department's screaming," he said, which was his own soft way of screaming.

I sat at the typewriter later and lighted my pipe. The thing should be simple to do. To describe that night all I would have to do was throw in every melodramatic prop in the book. Swiftly then, Mrs. Crisponi, weep loud and bitterly for thousands of waiting readers!

It had come, the night I had dreaded, the night I had prayed would never arrive.

The night Pete was to die!

I was alone in the apartment and everywhere I turned hung his ghost-like face. I wanted to flee yet knew not where, realising that no one can escape a memory. Even before he died, Pete was there to haunt me. That night I——

I stopped in the middle of the thought. An image had risen in my brain. It was neither Ginny nor Claire Crisponi, but an erotic combination of both. The creature had Ginny's face and body but the expression was that of Claire's of a certain moment and the flame within that body was Claire's too. Out of Ginny's lips came Claire's words, taunting and teasing. Its arms beckoned: here was to be fulfilment, not merely compliance. Instead of diffidence here was to be——

I tried to force the image from my thoughts.

It kept coming back.

I managed to hold off until two evenings later. That was a night when Ginny went to art class. I left the house, telling myself I was going . . . for a ride: just a ride. But within minutes I was heading toward Claire Crisponi's.

On her street small clusters of people were gathered on the steps in front of almost every house. Claire was there also, sitting with a thin little man. John Rockey was leaning against the wall, crutches under his armpits. He was holding a cat by the belly, taunting it with a piece of string. The cat kept snarling and trying to claw it, and John finally tossed the animal high in the air, its legs spread out, and laughed moronically as it scampered away.

I sat in the car, looking out the window. For a moment Claire did not seem to recognise me. Then she nodded casually. I said

something about being in the vicinity and thinking I'd drop by to say hello. I asked her how she was and she said fine. It was all very strained. She did not stand or ask me to come out. Soon I was driving away—hurt, puzzled and miserable, and swearing that that was the last time she would ever see me.

The following night I went back.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HER door was slightly open and the radio was playing loudly. I knocked, waited, then knocked again. I stepped inside. No one was in the living-room. Turning down the radio, I called, "Anyone home?" Claire came out of the bedroom, smoking and combing her hair: it was knotted and she kept pulling at it. She was wearing a house-dress and spike-heeled shoes, the ankle straps accentuating the sensuous form of her bare legs. She did not even nod; nothing ever seemed to surprise her. Head tilted to one side, she kept tugging at the comb. Now it was going smoothly and I waited until she was finished. She held up the comb, removed some hairs and let them drift to the rug.

I said, "You're most cordial, you know that?"

She frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I mean the way you greet me. You're so friendly."

"Why shouldn't I be friendly?"

"That's the point," I said, trying to contain myself, "you're not."

"You always talk in riddles?"

"Forget it." I sat down and pulled out a cigarette. She was looking into the mirror and combing her hair again. I said, "You weren't very nice to me last night."

"What's eating you? You sick or something?"

"I came over to see you last night and you weren't nice." I was talking like a child, and knew it. "You weren't friendly at all."

She grasped her hair at the back of her neck to see how it looked, then let go and, without a word, continued combing.

"You could have at least asked me to get out of the car," I said stupidly.

"You always have to be asked?" She put down her cigarette, went into the bedroom and came back with hairpins. She began piling the hair on top of her head and jabbing in pins.

I stood up. The door leading to the hall was still open and I closed it. As I walked back toward Claire I could see her eyes

following me in the mirror but she still kept putting the pins in her hair, only slower now. My arms went around her waist from the back. She dug her elbows into me and squirmed away.

My voice said thickly. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter. Only don't do that."

I grabbed her shoulders and drew her to me. She turned her head. I kissed her on the cheek and tried to force her head around but she wouldn't let me. I released her. She faced the mirror again, just as if nothing had happened, and pressed hands against her hair to mould it to shape. Her eyes had become glazy though.

"I don't mean a thing to you, do I?" I said. Instead of answering, she lighted a fresh cigarette. There was a rosette of smoke in her mouth and she swallowed it and let it out through her lips and nose. She put the cigarette aside and went back to her hair. "What we did that night," I said, "you forgot all about it the second we were through. I'm right, aren't I?"

"I had a good time, I never said I didn't have a good time."

"Is that all it meant to you—a good time?"

"Brother, you do ask the questions! What do you want me to say?"

This caught me off guard. What exactly did I want? I had loathed this woman once and probably would again, and yet it took little thought to realise that I wanted her to tell me that I alone satisfied a need in her. It would be worse than nothing any other way.

"You don't even like me, do you?" I said. She didn't answer. "Do you?"

"I never said that."

"Then why do you act this way to me? Last time you——"

"I just don't feel like messing. It's too warm and"—her eyes, calm once more, seemed to be taunting me from the mirror—"and I'm not in the mood."

I pulled her to me fiercely. "You're driving me crazy, do you realise that? I haven't been able to get you out of my mind and now——"

". . . Stop it." She inched her hands between us. I held her tightly. Gradually, as I'd hoped, her struggle became weaker. Her hands went limp against my chest. She turned her lips to mine with a soft moan. She was starting to breathe heavier. Then she slid her lips away. The side of her head was against my cheek. "You're only going to make me mad," she murmured,

unable to hold her body still. "You'll . . . you'll be sorry because you're only going to make me mad."

I did not want to do that and reluctantly I let her go. She stood with her eyes shut and her arms folded, as if she were chilled by passion. Her chest heaved, there was a nervous movement in her throat. She opened her eyes, blinked, then sat on the sofa, rubbing her fingers. Now and then she shuddered and tightened her bent arms at her sides.

She looked so terribly wretched in her fight for self-control that the flush of conquest disappeared completely and I felt only pity for her. Why had I done this? I thought of her now as a creature of great passions, lonely and aching for my love, wanting me and yet realising she had nothing to gain by it, and so trying to hide her emotions behind a cloak of indifference. I blamed only myself.

"I'm terribly sorry," I said. "Believe me I am." I sat next to her. "You're not angry at me, are you?"

"You were getting me mad."

"Please don't be angry at me."

"Forget it."

"Are you angry? You sound——"

"I told you to forget it, didn't I? *Jesus!*"

We sat there in a silence that was strained for me, while she seemed totally unaware of my presence. I wondered why I could not simply stand up and walk out on her. She had the ability to cut me, to make me feel foolish and clumsy—and yet obligated toward her.

"Do you want anything? Can I take you somewhere?"

Her face grew thoughtful.

"It's a beautiful night," I added.

She deliberated further, her forehead pinched by a tiny frown.

"You really want to take me somewhere?"

"I wouldn't ask, would I?"

She said she'd heard there was a carnival just outside the city limits and she wondered if we could go there: perhaps some of her old friends were with the show.

"Maybe it's better you don't see them," I suggested.

"Don't you want to take me?"

"I said that for your sake. I was thinking it might be painful for you to see——"

"Skip it." She slumped back.

A deep breath, and then I began an uneasy process of appease-

ment. Finally she stood up, although still sullen, and went into the bedroom. She came out wearing a fuzzy red sweater and a black skirt. She hadn't put on stockings.

The carnival was a twenty-minute ride from her place and as we neared it we could see a haze in the sky, like reddish smoke. The streets were so crowded that I had to park three blocks away. A river of people flowed toward the lot and it reached out to carry us along.

We walked down the festive midway, Claire searching the concessions on either side for a familiar face. Then she saw someone she knew. She left me abruptly and hurried to a stand where you pitched coins for prizes. The woman there, a blowsy character wearing what looked like a carpenter's apron, let out a whoop and hugged her. Claire acted as though I didn't exist. They talked for more than ten minutes, mostly about old times, and part of it was in a language of their own: this spot was a "red one" but the town before was "n.g." and I heard something about "flash" and "fuzz" and about a Ray who had committed suicide after losing a fortune in the "g-top".

We walked on.

"What're you thinking about, Claire?"

"Nothing."

"Yes you are. I can tell. I can see it in your eyes."

"Oh, Jesus!" she sighed.

Apologetically, "I annoy you, don't I?"

"You just talk so queer sometimes, that's all. You're always looking for things."

"Maybe you're right," I said thoughtfully.

We kept walking, this time in silence. Then she nudged me.

"You know that fellow?"

"Where?"

She nodded in the direction of one of the tents, where the concessionaire was waving at us and saying something I couldn't quite understand.

"I never saw him before," I said. "Maybe he knows you." The man was still waving.

"Not me," she said.

We walked over. The man wore a dark blue shirt, almost black, and he had a handkerchief around his throat. His face was thin and sunken, his sideburns went half-way down his cheeks. He looked part Indian. As we approached, he squinted at me, rubbed his chin and began shaking his head.

"I'll be damned if you don't look like him," he swore. "Same nose, same hair, same chin. Everything. Except you're taller and a little thinner. . . . Some fellow who beat me for fifty bucks yesterday," he explained sadly.

"I wish I were," I smiled.

"That's really funny. I called you over to see if I could get even. But I'm glad you're not that guy. He and this game of mine must be partners. What a time he gave me!" He closed his eyes to shut out the memory. "You don't know how it hurt me to give him fifty—" he pronounced it "fifuty"—"one dollar bills."

I looked at Claire. "Should we take some more of the man's money?" I was in the mood for diversion and my eyes asked her if the game was legitimate. She nodded. "No fancy tricks," I said lightly to the concessionaire. "I'm warning you, this lady here used to be a carny herself."

The man held up his hands. "Then go away. Leave me alone. I got a wife and kids. All I want tonight is suckers."

"I really feel sorry for you," I laughed. "How's it work?"

He explained the game. Three balls for a quarter. You had to roll the balls down an inclined board on which were numbered holes. The numbers corresponded to points on a master chart: some of them were worth anywhere from a half a point to ten, while others were blanks, or worth no points. To win five dollars or its equivalent in a prize, you had to make a total of ten points.

"What do you say?" I asked Claire.

She shrugged. "It's a percentage game. I've seen people win."

I let Claire roll one of the balls while I rolled the other two. The carny picked up the balls and studied his chart.

"Four points," he announced. "That's too bad."

"Hey," Claire spoke up, "don't you work it you can carry the points into the next game?"

The man groaned. Of all the people in this world, did he have to pick a carny to play to? All right, and he flattened his palms on the counter, all right this is what he'd do. Usually each game was complete in itself, but if I played again he'd let me keep the four points. All I needed now were six more. I turned to Claire and she encouraged me with her eyes. Down went another quarter. Carefully I rolled the balls.

This time the man threw his head back and clamped a hand over his brow.

"What did you step in, buddy?" he started to moan. "Show me where it is. I want to step in it myself."

Wiping his hands nervously on a handkerchief, he explained that one of the balls had entered a hole numbered twenty-nine. It did not mean points but it meant that if I doubled my play, that is if I bet fifty cents instead of a quarter, I would win ten dollars instead of five—and it also guaranteed me all my money back. I could not lose, therefore: all I had to do was keep playing until I made ten points.

I let Claire roll next and she made a single point. My turn and I hit a blank; a half a point followed. On my next roll I made another twenty-nine and the carny covered his face in anguish: I had to play for a dollar now but it also meant that I would win twenty dollars and all my money back.

Claire and I alternated in rolling the balls and by the time we reached nine and a half points, each game was costing me two dollars and I had lost close to twenty-five. Claire had become animated and I was tense with excitement. Then we began drawing a continuous series of blanks. The man had kept my enthusiasm at such a high pitch that it wasn't until the string of zeros that I became rational, realising that something was wrong with the game and that I could lose a million dollars before making that extra half point.

I said to Claire, "Let's get the devil out of here!"

Walking away, I was too angry at myself to say anything. Not only couldn't I afford to lose that money but how could I have been so stupid to let myself be drawn in like that? And even more aggravating was the fact that Claire, whom I blamed for encouraging me, did not seem concerned. I couldn't bear to look at her. As we headed out of the lot toward the car, Claire let out a little gasp. I asked what was the matter. Her eyes searched the ground around her feet. Then she straightened, saying she'd lost something. Would I wait here for her? Before I could answer, she was running off. I watched her re-enter the gate. I stood there a moment, trying not to believe the ugly thought forming in my mind. I told myself not to follow her, that it would be better I didn't know, and yet I was walking after her already. I could see Claire ahead of me. She walked directly to the tent where I had lost the money. I hung back, but close enough to see. The carny was grinning; he leaned over the counter and patted her cheek. Then, as though to each pound of my heart, he began counting out bills for her.

I felt no anger. I was too stunned for that. My only thought was to get out of there as quickly as I could. I drove home but could not make myself leave the car. Why had she done this to me? My collapsed ego demanded answers.

I released the brake and drove to her place.

I knew she could not be home yet, so I waited outside her house. About a half hour later she stepped off a streetcar at the corner. I got out of the car. She stopped when she saw me and then tried to walk around me. I caught her arm. She pulled it away.

"You got your nerve ditchin' me," she said.

"Get in the car."

She tried to walk on but I blocked the way. What she saw on my face worried her. Inside the car she said, "I'm not used to being talked to this way."

"First of all give me the money you and that carnival character stole from me."

"You're crazy!" She looked out her window.

"I followed you, Claire," I said. "I saw him pay you off."

She turned back. Then she shrugged and opened her purse. She threw some bills on the seat.

"Why did you do that to me?" I asked quietly. "What did I ever do to deserve it? Have I ever hurt you?" She sat unblinking. "Damn it," I shouted, "answer me!"

Her lips began to quiver. "Don't talk to me like that."

"That's it, start crying."

She whirled. "You got a good case, brother."

"I'm waiting."

She started to say something then stopped. She peered out the side window. "I needed the money."

"You made two hundred from me, didn't you?"

"How long do you think that's going to last, all my life?" She still was not facing me. "Right now I got an insurance premium to pay, there's the rent, I'm seeing a doctor——"

"Don't you have any kind of income?"

"Yeah, I got a millionaire uncle in Cuba. He sends me a thousand dollars a week."

"I'm talking seriously now."

She came around, eyes hard. "Where the devil would I have an income?"

"Don't you intend working?"

"I got to straighten myself out first, don't I? My blood pres-

sure's over a hundred and sixty-five. I got kidney trouble. I——” She took a cigarette from her purse. “What's the difference!”

“What was that fellow at the carnival?”

For a time I thought she wasn't going to answer. Then she said Charlie was someone she and her husband had known in the old days. She would have let it go at that but I prodded her on and she said Charlie had dropped by that morning, the first she'd known he was in town with a show.

“He said any mark I brought to the lot I could have half the score. That's the way they work it sometimes.”

“Meet Mr. Mark,” I said with some bitterness, and yet without wanting to I was feeling sorry for her again.

“You don't have to believe this either,” she said. “I never had no intention bringing you out there. I didn't plant it, I mean. It was just when you asked if I wanted to go somewhere that I thought about it. I thought you wouldn't miss the money. You got a nice car, you dress good. I thought a few bucks wouldn't mean nothing to you. I . . . oh, forget it!” Her voice grew sullen. “Why'n't you just hit me and get it over with?”

“Is that what you're used to, getting hit?” She looked so very pitiful with her head lowered and fingers running along her unlighted cigarette.

“I've learned to roll with 'em.”

“Come here.” I held out an arm.

She glanced at me suspiciously. “What do you want?”

“I want you to sit next to me.”

Putting her purse on the other side, she slid over. She rested against my shoulder.

“You're sorry for what you did, aren't you?” I said. Looking down at her, “Aren't you going to tell me you're sorry?”

“Okay, I'm sorry.” She said it as if it were a task.

“I don't mean that way.”

“Look, I said I'm sorry, didn't I?”

“You're a very strange person, Claire.”

She lifted her head, not quite sure if she should be angry. “How do you mean?”

“You act callous and indifferent and yet I know it's only a front. You keep everything bottled up inside you, you're afraid to say or act the way you really feel. You're suspicious, you're always on your guard. And it's probably because of everything you've been through. You've been beaten down all your life. You've never had anyone treat you nice.” Her head

went back against my shoulder. "You're lonely, aren't you, Claire?"

"I guess," she said tiredly.

"What're you going to do for money?"

"I don't know," she said, thinking. "I guess I'll go to my mother. I wrote her."

Something jabbed through me. "You mean you're going to leave town?"

"Probably."

"When?"

"Next week. Maybe the week after."

"For good?"

"I might as well."

I raised her head and looked into her eyes. She said slowly, "What're you looking at me like that for?"

"You tell me."

She swallowed. "You're quite a guy."

"I don't want you to go," my voice said. I squeezed her shoulders and her head went to one side, eyes closed. "I'll help you a little, Claire. I don't have much, but whatever I can . . ." Her head kept swaying in rising passion, eyelids shut and trembling.

Weakly, "I don't like to take money from gentlemen." And then as though something snapped inside her she came forward and pressed her mouth against mine. Her fingers went through my hair, they glided down my neck and clutched and dug. Her body quivered, she could not press herself tight enough against me. Slowly, then, she drew away, her eyes fixed on me, her breath coming in short gasps. She reached out and grasped the door handle. She slid out and waited for me on the sidewalk. As we headed toward the house she fumbled in her purse. She gave me her key.

Ginny asked me about Provincetown the next morning over the breakfast table. I wanted to tell her that we were going, that she should call her office and give notice, yet I could not say the words. Instead, afraid the lie was showing on my face, I said that "something" had come up with Davenport that would delay the trip. She did not question me further. She trusted me.

That night, walking to a movie, Ginny tugged at my arm and we stopped to look into the window of a piano store. Ginny

had her nose pressed almost against the glass, her gaze fixed upon a walnut spinet in the corner: she'd had a baby grand at home. She asked if it would be silly if we walked in and just looked around. No, it wouldn't be silly. A salesman with the polish of a funeral director approached us as we entered. Ginny ran her hand across the smooth finish of the spinet, the salesman's face expressing approval at the wisdom of her choice. Her fingers trickled over the keys. Hesitantly she asked the salesman the price. A bargain, came the answer, at eight hundred and seventy-five dollars. She smiled and took my arm and as we walked out the salesman said that ten per cent came off if I'd been a G.I. Ginny shook her head.

The following week, one afternoon while on my way home from Claire's, I passed that same store. I walked away, then came back and peered in the window again. I realised I could not afford the spinet and yet on impulse entered the store. The salesman was glad to arrange terms.

CHAPTER TWELVE

DAVENPORT called to remind me that I had been neglecting him. "You used to give me two, sometimes three stories a month, Paul. These days I don't know if you're averaging one. Copy, Paul!" he boomed. "What about some copy?"

"I don't have a thing, Howard," I apologised. "There hasn't been a decent case around here since that Crisponi business. It . . . it's not that I haven't been on the look-out either."

"That's the same story I hear from all the boys. What's the matter with our criminals? There's a drought in crime throughout the country and don't think we're not feeling it. . . . Look, Paul, you get me a nice juicy lead story I can play up on the cover and we'll start thinking in terms of a bonus. I guess you can always use the extra groceries, can't you?"

"I . . . certainly can."

"Then let's see some copy. The only way you can make those dollars is by putting one word down after the other on paper. Blank pages don't count, right?" and he laughed.

I had been working on my novel at the time of the call and now I went back to it. I read the paragraph I'd written previously, then pulled the paper out of the typewriter roller, crumbled and tossed it into the basket. All morning I had been doing just this. For the past few weeks, in fact, I had been fighting the book, fighting myself, bullying the thing along in the way you might push a car with the brakes locked. The temptation came on me now to re-read the last couple chapters, but I resisted it. What I had to do was keep writing until I had the full picture. Once I had the entire rough draft, I could go back then and dig into it—reconstruct, polish, mould. This was no time for evaluation: doubt and self-criticism might destroy the will to go on. Yet I wondered and worried if what I had been doing was good or bad.

I thought of Davenport's call.

Book or no book, he wanted stories and if I didn't get them for him someone else would. Friendship did not cover care-

lessness or neglect and he would drop me without a qualm. And was I in a position to take that gamble? I was putting all my hopes in the novel, but what if it failed, what then? I still might need Davenport.

And then there was an even more realistic problem: money. I hadn't made a cent since the Crisponi by-line and, in addition to the piano down-payment, I had given Claire sixty dollars: extra expenses, out of my own small savings—and the immediate future was uncertain. If I could get a few hundred dollars together, I would not be pressed for another month and could work on the novel with an easier mind; and also by selling a story to Davenport I could ease the situation there.

My hand was already reaching for the phone. I put through a call to Detective McHugh at the Safe Squad office. Sure, he'd be glad to help me. He had a few old cases I might be able to use, but the trouble was that he wouldn't be able to get together with me for a few days. He was on a job that was taking up all his time, but it should be cleared up soon: they had one fellow on ice right now and the moment he cracked there would be a few more "collars"—arrests—and then that would be it. Get in touch with him in about a week. The loose ends surely would be tied up by then.

I called a few other officers I knew—the lieutenant in charge of Narcotics, a member of the Pickpocket Squad, a couple of district men: all were cordial, all willing, but either they didn't have a good case or else they hadn't the time to give it out now.

Detective Ferguson remained as a hope, but that call would have to wait until evening when he came home. I pulled out a file cabinet drawer and ran my thumb over the envelopes containing newspaper clippings. The Mangus-VanPorter envelope caught my attention and I drew it out and dumped its contents on the desk. There were only four clips and I read them, trying to find something that might salvage as a story the murder of the hardware store owner. Nothing. A woman spots a licence number, a check of ownership is made at the Bureau of Vehicles, arrest follows. As routine as breathing, and of course VanPorter's being a Negro made the case even weaker. It would take a lot of doing to make this one saleable. I jostled a cigarette out of the pack. Perhaps Ferguson had some information that would help. I lighted the cigarette and went back on the swivel chair, one foot on the desk.

A thought was building up within me and I played with it,

not seriously at first but in the way of a day-dream. Let's assume, I mused, Ferguson could do it; all right, even so. The twenty-five dollars I would have to pay him began to loom as an unnecessary expense, and idly I toyed with ways of getting around it. Say . . . say, I whipped up the story just from clippings; I wouldn't of course, but make believe I did. How would I go about it? The weak part of the investigation naturally was the woman giving the police the licence numbers. I could not delete that entirely but I could soften it by having her give them only the first three numbers, then having them go to the Bureau of Vehicles to make a list of every car owner who had plates with those digits. They would then begin a canvass of the city. (Good, very good so far. Now . . .) Because of the senseless brutality of the crime, the shooting in the back, I might have the officers deduce that their man could be a narcotics addict, and during the city-wide canvass they would suspect several men who would not be cleared until the end of the story. Finally (Let's see . . . yes) finally they would come to George VanPorter and one of the detectives would note that the kid's eyes looked strange, and an investigation would prove him a marihuana smoker. A search of his house would produce a revolver which a ballistics test would establish as the murder weapon and which would result in his confession.

Should I do it? Most of the boys did, so why shouldn't I? VanPorter was guilty; he certainly had no chance of acquittal, so whatever I wrote would mean little to him one way or the other. Actually all I would be doing was to make the cops look good. All right, this would be cutting a few corners but Davenport would never find out; and anyway I had myself to think about, didn't I? It would be this time and no more . . . but I needed money. I needed money even more than Davenport needed copy.

Before I could lose my nerve, I picked up the phone and called New York. It was simpler than I'd even hoped: Davenport complimented me on my resourcefulness in digging into the case for "unpublished facts," and he agreed that these made it strong enough to compensate for the Negro angle. He cautioned me, however, not to mention that VanPorter was coloured, and his picture was not to be used—although I was to send him all other photographs.

"Give me a hard punching story, Paul, and there's that little bonus I spoke about."

The writing set a new record for me. I did it in about four and a half hours, typing almost without pause, and sent off the manuscript early that evening after only a cursory reading. The story as it stood had all the elements and it was a sure sale. As for photographs, I would be able to buy prints from the newspapers and sell them to Davenport at a profit.

I marvelled how easy it could be to make money.

In the next two weeks I saw Claire Crisponi twice, once in the afternoon and once in the evening. She would greet me phlegmatically after long periods of absence and would not question me as to where I had been or what I was doing. She knew almost nothing about me and did not seem to care. It probably never occurred to her even to ask if I was married. She was stupid and entirely without humour, yet I kept probing for something more and was always surprised when I found nothing. While I could never tell when she was happy, there was no mistaking her moments of bitterness; but usually her demeanour was simply one of indifference, an indifference that would melt only with my touch.

Although Claire was not personally unclean, she was untidy about the apartment, and lazy. Dishes would remain for days in the sink, cigarette butts twisted into cups where sugar had dried. She was always complaining of being tired, overworked, or ill. I sensed she was ashamed of her background and lack of education but I could not be sure if she resented or stood in awe of mine. Occasionally she would sullenly accuse me of trying to "correct" her: perhaps—I can't remember—I tried. Whether it was conscious on her part or not, she was always able to keep me on the defensive, even when it came to giving her money. I never stopped feeling clumsy about it (I'd often wondered how it was done) and somehow, though it was nothing she said directly, she made me think I was forcing something wrong upon her. Our entire relationship resulted in a sense of self-blame, for since she was willing to remain unquestioning in the dark background of my life, I felt I was taking advantage of her. She never gave me the satisfaction of telling me otherwise, or even what she thought of me. We were strangers to each other except in passion, where we met like rivers that join in violent tumult and then part.

My own feelings toward her were mixed and probably fringed every emotion. In our impassioned moments I could even love

for a fleeting time the shadowed and exotic image she represented behind my closed eyelids, and yet seconds afterwards I could pity or despise the woman she was. I wanted to think of Claire as something I could find by opening a drawer, and then put away just as easily; but at the same time I wanted her to love and need me—though, strangely enough, if she would have called me, run after and clutched me, sought me for her own for all time, I might never have seen her again. Perhaps it was her lack of affection as well as her fire that kept bringing me back, like some mystery I had to solve. I would tell myself that she was just afraid to show how she felt, that she purposely was keeping it within her, and yet I couldn't be sure.

My ego, as I see it now, demanded completion. I needed to love and be loved in round measure, to possess a woman in her entirety, but what I had were segments: Ginny, affection without passion; Claire, passion without affection. Neither sufficed alone.

Meanwhile the shoddy hour or so a week I spent with Claire, the stealth, going and leaving, trying even to avoid the Rockeys, was only instilling in me a greater desire to cling to the good clean sane life with Ginny, who one day I was certain would resolve all my needs. It resulted in my wanting to do things for her. Not quite aware that I was trying to buy off my guilt—and completely unaware that I was trying also to "satisfy" her with material things—I surprised her one night with a record player and a *Traviata* album, and one week-end I took her to the seashore and above her mild protests we stayed at an expensive ocean-front hotel. When we walked through the lobby, many people turned to look at her, and it was a good feeling: she was my beautiful possession, and I thought of clothes I wanted her to have. That Sunday we stopped at an auction place on the boardwalk and Ginny gasped in astonishment when I put in a bid for an imported vase she'd admired excitedly, and later—as though I'd been joking—she said it was a good thing someone had outbid me, but I was sorry. I even felt a sense of failure and resented my conqueror, a jowly man with a cigar who was peeling out bills and grinning fatly at his wife who wore a mink stole and a bored look.

The chapter wasn't going right. I did about a half a page and tore it out of the roller without reading. It felt wrong; I did not have to read it to know. I tried again but didn't even get that far.

Pressing the butt of my cigarette against a fresh one, I stood up. I rubbed my hands nervously, then sat down.

Once again I was typing. No good, no good! This was not the way at all. I had to take it easy, I had to think, I could not go too fast. That was my trouble lately: I was too hurried. A book could take years, it should not be rushed along. But how could I write leisurely? Writing was my livelihood. It was my pick and shovel. As Davenport had said, everything involved my "putting one word down after the other on paper." How could I take my time? Arms crossed on the desk, I smoked and thought.

I thought of Dan O'Connor. Reflectively at first and then with a race of excitement.

That was a way. It could be as simple as collecting rent. And why not? Why couldn't I do what a lot of others did—rewrite my published stories for other magazines and under different by-lines? In my files were at least forty stories that could be rehashed and resold. Why not see what Dan could do with one of them? If it sold, I would give him a percentage and both of us would profit. Then perhaps he could do others, and meanwhile I'd be able to devote relaxed time to the book. Contrary to Davenport's opinion, I assured myself, those cases were public record and I could write as many stories around them as I wanted. Davenport would lose nothing by my doing them over: he'd published them already and had no further use for the material. What difference should it make to him? He had no business keeping all rights to stories in the first place. It probably was just a means of holding his writers in a form of bondage so that they would be on the constant search for new cases. Well, the hell with him!

I took a two-year-old *Squadcar* from my files and selected one of my stories. Dan wasn't much of a writer but then you didn't have to be; and I would sketch an outline of the rewrite for him that almost anyone could follow, blocking out the parts carefully, throwing in a few suspects and clues which would improve on the original, indicating where everything including conversation was to go. And there would be a few simple tricks to teach him: how the wholesale use of exclamation marks told the reader to get excited; how questions were supposed to build up suspense ("Would the murderer be found before other innocent lives were lost?"); and how, even if the officers bashed in a man's head to get a confession, they had to do it for our

public by skilful questioning or by something equal to fingernail scrapings.

I called Dan O'Connor at his home.

Dan brought the rewrite back in a week. It was, as I'd expected, poorly written, but what counted was that the facts were in accepted style. I made many corrections and additions before sending it off to *Sharpshooter Detective*, whipping the lead into more sensational form, tightening and making more urgent the detectives' anxieties, hopes and fears, and polishing it in general. There was no doubt the finished product would sell.

"Scruples, schmooles, this is *it*, baby, this is *it*," Dan exulted. "I can't do it yet, I can't give up the old pay-cheque yet, but one of these days we do it right. You and me, we open an office, me I kick my editor in his fat tokas and I'm in it full time with you. Jayzus, we'll make a fortune. 'Weiler and O'Connor—You Kill 'Em We Write 'Em.'" He clapped his hands. "Let's have another one, baby. Got one in the sex line this time?"

Dan, I could see, should do well. I outlined another of my stories for him.

Though I thought that now I would have time to get back to the book, two new cases broke almost simultaneously. Although the newspaper clippings weren't too complete, they served my purpose.

The door to Claire's apartment was closed but unlocked. I opened it and walked into the living-room. The corner floor lamp was burning but the rest of the apartment was dark. And empty.

Claire's pocket-book lay open on the sofa, some of its contents fanned out. She'd probably just stepped out for a few minutes. But after a half hour she still hadn't returned. I was edgy. Ginny was at her art class and I had promised to meet her at eleven. It was now almost ten. Where could Claire be? Perhaps at the Rockeys. She had no other friends she ever mentioned. Should I knock on their door? I hated to do that. Whenever possible I kept out of their way. Although they most likely knew how often I was seeing Claire, still I found some degree of comfort in at least trying to cloak my visits from them.

After about ten more minutes I couldn't hold out any more and rapped on the Rocky door. There was no answer and I

knocked again. Still nothing. I went outside and saw that lights were on in the apartment. When I came in again, John Rockey was standing at the door, hunched forward on his crutches. He wore neither a shirt nor undershirt, and the loose rolls of flesh over his trousers were pink and damp. He had tiny red pimples on his shoulders; the smell of sweat was sharper than ever. Although I pitied him his ugliness and deformity, these—despite myself—added to the incident with the cat and to his unspoken but hostile attitude toward me, had built up in me a feeling of revulsion?

"Is Mrs. Crisponi in your place?"

He shook his head curtly. I wondered if he resented me or my healthy legs.

"Do you know where she is?"

"How do I know?" He was starting to close the door.

"Did you see her go out?" But the door slammed shut and I heard the inside bolt shoot across. I walked out to the car, angry and telling myself I couldn't be angry at a moron.

I sat in the car, anxiously waiting for Claire to walk down the street or step off each trolley that stopped at the corner. She didn't show up by a quarter to eleven, and I had to leave. I drove away, jealous and puzzled by jealousy.

The next day, shortly before noon, I went to see Claire again. She was in the kitchen, making coffee. She nodded sleepily, yawned against the back of her hand and adjusted the flame under the percolator.

I said, "I was over to see you last night." She made some kind of noise and I said foolishly, "You weren't home." No answer from her. "... Where were you?"

"I went to a movie."

"What did you see?"

"Some picture."

"I mean the title."

"How do I know? I never remember those things. It was one of those cowboy pictures."

"You had a date last night, didn't you?" When she didn't answer, I fairly shouted, "Didn't you?"

"Don't you yell at me."

"Who was he, Claire?" I insisted, though realising it shouldn't matter, that nothing should matter.

"You keep this up, I'm going into the other room. I got a headache."

"Look, I know you were out and I know you weren't by yourself! Now damn it tell me the truth!"

"I can see you never had a splitting headache," she complained, rubbing her temples.

"Why don't you stop that whining? It's making me sick!"

She came around slowly. Her face, her eyes, were hard. "Maybe you'll think different when you know I'm going to have a baby," and with that bombshell she turned away and sniffed.

There was an explosion in my chest as if my heart had burst and its hot fluids were rushing through me. A band of fire had tightened around my brain.

"You're lying! Tell me, tell me you're lying!"

"Yeah?"

"How do you know? . . . Look at me, how do you know?"

"I know, I just know. And stop yelling. I told you I got a headache."

"Have you been to a doctor?" I demanded frantically.

She kept looking at the floor.

"Claire," I threatened, "if you don't look at me, if you don't act like a normal human being, I don't know what I'll do! I—I'll leave you!"

She shrugged that it made little difference. Yet how could I?

"Have you been to a doctor?"

"No, I haven't been to a doctor," she mimicked.

"Then for Christ's sake, how do you know?" Hope, and I grasped it.

"I can tell," she said.

I paced. I don't know how long I paced.

"We're going to a doctor," I said.

"I'm not going to no doctor."

"Are you out of your mind?" I was losing complete control of myself. "We can't let it go, can't you understand that?"

"I'm not letting no doctor examine *me*!" She turned off the burner and headed toward the living-room. I caught her.

"You're going to listen to me, Claire, you hear? You're going to listen to everything I say! You're going to do whatever I want!"

"I'm not going to no doctor," she repeated weakly.

"Do you want a baby?" The words themselves were hard to say.

"I'll be all right. Now let me go, y-you're hurting me."

"Are you going to listen to me?"

"I—I'll be all right." She struggled to get free, twisting and squirming, but I held on to her arms. Then she went limp. "Most likely . . . most likely nothing's even . . . even wrong."

I leaped on that. "Why do you say nothing's wrong now? What's made you change your story? . . . Claire, I'm telling you, answer me!"

"Christ, I was only kidding you! Can't you be kidded?" With a burst of effort she wrenched herself free and took a few steps. "I kept telling you I had a headache and you were on my ear and I thought this way——"

I pulled her around and slapped her. Across the face and with all my strength. She winced, squeezed her eyes shut and I was furious enough to slap her again. Now as the fiery imprints blazed on her cheeks she just stared at me. She did not cry. I would have felt better if she had cried or hit back in rage. But neither. She simply looked at me, and nothing could have hurt me more. The blame became entirely mine this way. I slumped on a chair, unable to face her. The word "brute" kept rolling in my brain: I had become a brute. I forced myself to look up. Claire was pulling a cigarette out of a crumpled pack, her cheeks still red, her eyes like those of a beaten animal. Slowly I got up. She did not say a word in reproach as I mumbled apologies. Nor when I came forward to hold her did she turn away. And yet somehow this only made it worse.

That night I dreamed Claire's lie was truth and that she was moaning she had nowhere to turn and was going to tell my wife, and I kept begging her not to. And then, as though this were the dream, a voice called my name, far away and then closer, someone shook me and now I was sitting up in terror.

Ginny, sitting erect, was holding her breast. "Paul, you can't imagine how you scared me!"

I went back on the pillow. My chest rose and fell with my heavy breathing.

"You were shouting and then . . . and then you began to cry like a baby."

Her words sent a fresh tremor through me. What had I shouted? I was afraid to ask, afraid even that I might find the answer on her face. But she came down next to me and put her arm across my chest. "You kept calling my name. That's what

woke me. It was such a terrible cry, like . . . like someone was tearing out your heart . . . Paul, what were you dreaming?"

I said something about a burglar chasing her, and wondered; but it was good enough. She squeezed me and then kissed me on the mouth. Lightly, "Didn't I tell you you ought to stop writing those stories?"

That didn't help either. I slipped out of bed and took a cigarette from my shirt pocket. I was still jumpy.

"Do you have to smoke?" Ginny said. "You've been smoking so much lately."

Had I? I hadn't realised. Lighting the cigarette, I sat on the edge of the bed. I couldn't shake off the dream.

"Talk to me, Paul," Ginny said from the pillow.

The dream, everything . . .

"Paul, I asked you something."

"Please, Ginny, I'm not in the mood."

"I want you to talk to me."

I closed my eyes. I could talk to her, all right! I could tell her a few things—about how she was driving me to Claire and how I couldn't do anything about it and how it was gradually destroying me. For the first time I consciously was blaming Ginny in part instead of taking everything on myself. I had to share my guilt; I could not stand it alone. The warm breeze blowing through the windows made my sweaty flesh shiver but I could not lie down. Sleep held no peace, no forgetting.

"How's the book going, darling?"

So painfully, so laboriously was the book moving that Ginny's question became too much. "Ginny, will you let me alone?" I pounded a fist against my thigh and jumped up. I practically ran out of the room. In the living-room I sat down, head lowered, and held my temples. I hated Ginny, I hated Claire, I hated myself. I hated the world for its complexities. I wanted to die and thought of ways. It seemed to me I sought so little out of life—happiness in love and work; and yet too much to ask? Too much, too much?

Ginny came into the room. She called my name in a shaking voice. I did not look up or answer. She sat next to me. "Paul . . . Paul, I didn't mean anything. I—I just wanted to talk to you . . . We haven't for such a long while—" (Go away! Please, please, go away!)—"really talked, that is. The way we used to, about the book, about things like that."

I clasped my hands on my neck and squeezed. There was a

shrivelling within me. What could I say to her? So much to say, and yet what?

"I realise how hard you're working on your book, I know you're all tied up in it . . . and that's how it should be because what you're doing is good and worth while. But I'm jealous enough to want to be a part of it. I want to be a part of . . . even of the aggravations. I want this book to be mine too. I want to be a part of all the good things you do, and you're going to do them, Paul . . ."

"Ginny . . . will you . . . will you let me alone? Please?"

I felt her watching me. After a while she turned and walked back to the bedroom. I raised my head. I wanted to go after her. But I couldn't. I remained in the living-room a long time by myself.

I wanted to think of Claire as something I could find by opening a drawer, and then put away just as easily. . . .

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A LAWYER named J. Arthur Margolis called that week and said he would like to see me. I asked what he wanted but he said he preferred discussing it either at my place or his—today, if I could possibly make it. I told him I would be over.

I didn't like it. Lawyers, in this business, could mean only trouble and, furthermore, Margolis's reputation was familiar to me. He was the attorney who after a five year struggle was recently able to win a new trial—and freedom—for a lifer, by digging up and presenting evidence (which he'd claimed the police had suppressed) that supported the convicted man's alibi. Detective Ferguson at the time had told me disgustedly that "every cop oughta turn in his badge" and that "they might as well open the prisons and let 'em all out." He called Margolis a "mischief-maker from way back, who was getting paid off plenty from somewhere." I recalled another case Margolis had handled—the unsuccessful attempt to keep an escaped convict from being returned to a South Carolina chain gang. And there had been others. All on behalf of "causes".

I wondered what the man wanted of me.

That afternoon I opened the door to a compressed suite of offices in one of the oldest buildings in town. From Ferguson's description of Margolis, and from the publicity he'd received, I had expected something much more pretentious. The door to his room was open and he waved me in from his desk. Margolis was a man of average height although of slight build, probably in his middle forties. His hairline began well to the centre of his head and formed, from the front, a fuzzy brown halo. He had watery eyes, a long nose and full lips but there was a sensitivity about his unhandsome face.

His office faced a court and was small and shadowed. Bookcases lined one wall while on the others were hung pictures of Abraham Lincoln, Cicero and former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, and an assortment of diplomas. To my dismay, he took from a drawer the current issue of *Squadcar* and opened it

to my story on the Mangus-VanPorter case. Several paragraphs were encircled. I realised, even before he confirmed it, that he was VanPorter's attorney. Remembering how I'd written the thing entirely from newspaper clippings and my imagination, I went for a cigarette and tried to appear calm.

Looking at the magazine and not at me, Margolis said he got my name from Davenport, whom he'd called. Speaking softly, he said that he'd wanted to see me because the case was coming up for trial next week and he thought I could help him. He thanked me for coming. Then he pushed the magazine to one side and leaned on his elbows. He did not look angry. He even seemed incapable of anger.

"Actually, Mr. Weiler," he said, "I only want to know one thing from you. Who gave you the information for this story?"

This is what I'd feared. I drew in on the cigarette and tried to figure something out, hoping confusion did not show on my face. Then I told him that my source was a detective whose identity I could not reveal.

"I promise you that I won't mention your name," he said. "All I want to do is talk to him."

I shook my head.

"Why?"

"Because I can't jeopardise him in the Department. And I also can't risk losing his friendship. He's too important to me in my work."

"Let me put it to you this way, Mr. Weiler." He adjusted his position on his elbows. "Your story leads me to believe that the police are withholding evidence that could clear VanPorter of this crime. You've got facts in there that I've never heard about and which, if true, prove that VanPorter could never have committed the murder."

Bringing his chair closer, he explained that much of the detectives' case against VanPorter was based upon the woman who'd given them the automobile licence numbers. While I tried to recollect what I'd written, to separate this story in my mind from the ones I'd done before and since, Margolis went on to say that he was positive the woman couldn't have seen all those numbers from where she'd been standing across the street from the hardware store. First of all, he knew for a fact that she had faulty vision; secondly, he himself had stood where she'd been and he, with good vision, had been unable to read the numbers of a car parked in front of the store.

"The police claim," he said quietly, "that the woman gave them all the numbers. Your story—" and I'd forgotten this point entirely—"your story says she gave them only three. That's quite a difference. Now," he interlocked slender fingers, "your story doesn't mention this, in fact it never came out in the papers, but do you know that the woman told the police that the getaway car was a green Plymouth? VanPorter's car—actually it's his father's—happens to be a Ford."

What could I say? There was nothing I could do for the man and yet I just couldn't tell him that I'd faked the story.

"So you can see where your facts, if I could get the detectives to admit them from the stand, would be invaluable to me. And another thing. You say that the police felt certain the killer was a narcotics addict and that they claim VanPorter smoked marihuana. Mr. Weiler, VanPorter never touched marihuana in his life. And if I can prove that the police were actually hunting a dope fiend, that would also be important." His hands went out. "Now will you help me, Mr. Weiler?"

"You're putting me in a terrible position——"

"Just remember this. A boy's life could depend on you."

"That's a rotten thing to say!" It was like, sitting there so helplessly, I'd been waiting for a chance to snap back at him. "First of all, I don't believe the police would suppress important evidence——"

"Not even when they're sure the man they've got is guilty?" He smiled thinly.

"And then, my God, you're talking as if VanPorter's innocent! Don't forget he confessed—" and here I paused for emphasis—"to shooting a man in the back!"

Unruffled, he nodded. And then, as though reciting from a paper, "George VanPorter is nineteen years old but he's got the mentality of a boy of seven. He's had only four years of formal education. He just about knows how to spell his name. Now take that boy and put him in a tiny room and surround him with officers and then have them yell at him and accuse him of everything under the sun. Maybe have them hit him. Then have them tell him that if he signs this paper he won't be hurt any more, that maybe they'll even let him go. . . . What do you think he's going to do?"

"You're supposing an awful lot of things."

"VanPorter was in custody three days before anyone saw him," Margolis reminded me grimly. "And incidentally there's some-

thing else. Your story says the police found a revolver in his house. That's not true and they don't even claim it. They say he threw the gun away. . . . But I'm telling you he never even owned one.

Not knowing what else to say, I said, "Mr. Margolis, you're asking me to go back on my word to a friend."

"Then let me ask you this. You mentioned two men whose names you changed in the story and whom you say the police picked up and cleared during the investigation. The police claim, though, that Van Porter was their only suspect. Could I have the real names of those men?"

I told him I didn't know them. Actually, of course, no such men existed.

Margolis pulled at his checks. He stared at his cluttered desk. He looked tired. His face came up slowly. "Mr. Weiler, I'm pleading with you. I'm begging you to help me save the life of an innocent boy."

I stood up. How much more? "I'm not going to let you put me on a spot like this, Mr. Margolis. I don't have to listen to you accuse me of being the difference between that boy going free and getting the chair. It's not true and I won't hear it!"

"It's not as far-fetched as you might like to believe," he said quietly.

"That kid's guilty and you know it!"

"I do?" He shook his head. "The boy is innocent. I've spoken to him, I feel it, I know it."

"Sure——" I hadn't wanted to say this, it merely came out—"you're being paid to know it."

"Pay?" He smiled a sad little smile. "I assure you, Mr Weiler, you've received a hundred per cent more for your story than I'll get for trying this case. But it really doesn't matter because no amount of money could pay for all the work, time, energy and sleepless nights that have gone into this thing. And do you know what keeps me up nights, Mr. Weiler? The thought of that confused helpless boy in the electric chair. . . . Have you ever seen the death house, Mr. Weiler? Do you know what happens?"

Coming back was the memory of what Lieutenant Thompson had written. . . .

"Before a man's to die," Margolis said, staring at me, "they test the generators and the men in the death house hear it, and that alone's a terrible thing. They should just let a man hear those generators and that should be his sentence. The dying is

the easy part. The real sentence is the wait and the walk. The real sentence is the way they clip off their hair, and the pants they give them with the slit in the leg, and the slippers. The real sentence is seeing other men walk first. It's the delay and the reprieves, it's the months and years of reprieves and waiting that make the real sentence. Go see an execution, Mr. Weiler. I suggest it. I understand there's one place where the executioner even comes out dressed in red. Oh, it must make a beautiful sight! The state seeks justice and not revenge, doesn't it? That's why it will remove a man's appendix or dose him with aureomycin a week before he's to die just to let him hear those generators and take that nice walk. They could kill him in his sleep with a needle or they could drug him so he doesn't know, but that would be too simple and clean. He's got to die with all the trimmings. . . . I have the feeling, Mr. Weiler, that future generations will remember us for the electric chair as well as for the atom bomb." He got up. He took a pipe from a rack and appeared to study it. "Can't I appeal to you in any way, Mr. Weiler?"

I wanted to leave and yet I couldn't. I had to say something, to defend myself.

"Mr. Margolis," I said earnestly, "this is rather hard to say but I want to explain something to you. It's only fair to you and me that I do. I don't want you to think I'm a monster who doesn't care if a kid goes to the chair. If I could help you I would, but I can't."

Folding the magazine, and in a dry voice, "I think we've already been through that."

"No . . . no, you don't understand." I hesitated, wondering if I would only get myself in trouble; but I had to tell the truth. "I'm a writer, Mr. Margolis. I put words down on paper and if I don't sell those words I don't eat. It so happens I make my living out of writing these detective stories. And I've got to sell what I write. My purpose in doing these things is not to tamper with justice or obstruct it or hurt anyone. And at the same time I don't carry any torches. I'm just a little guy sitting in his room pounding out stories. . . . Do I make myself clear?"

"As far as you've gone." Just as dryly.

"You're putting too much importance to these stories. Certainly you realise how some of these things are written. I'm sure you're not that naïve. The idea is to make a good detective story out of a case . . . and sometimes that takes work . . . a

little imagination here and there . . . some elaboration. You know. That's what I meant when I said I couldn't be of too much help to you."

"I see." Still in a quiet voice, but there was something different about it now. He folded his arms and peered out the window. I felt he didn't like to look at me. Then as if he couldn't help himself he turned with, "So all you are, Mr. Weiler, is a little guy pounding out stories, aren't you? A little guy who doesn't want to tamper with justice or hurt anyone. But you forget one thing. You forget that this falsification which you euphemistically call imagination concerns actual people. They aren't people of words, they're flesh and blood, Mr. Weiler. In this case, for instance. By your lies, distortions and half-truths, by your assumptions and insinuations, do you have any idea how much you possibly could have hurt VanPorter? You forget your story has a wide circulation here because of local interest in the case. Do you realise how much you've helped to fan hatred and prejudice against him?"

"My story won't affect his having a fair trial," I came back.

"The trial that takes place in men's minds?"

"The real trial. The one that counts."

"I hope not. But one of my big jobs will be to weed out persons from the jury who have read your story. I hope I'm successful in that. You should be very proud of yourself, Mr. Weiler." He nodded stiffly. He began to straighten papers on his desk. It was his gesture for me to leave, and I took it. I stopped for a drink before going home.

"What did that lawyer want?" Davenport called to ask later that day.

"He was a little excited we ran VanPorter's story before the trial."

"Oh, nonsense!" He sounded relieved. He even chuckled. "He probably was trying to scare you into greasing his palm. I know those lawyers!"

"That's probably it," I said.

Dan and I began to average two sales a week. One day, after I'd been with Claire only a couple of hours before, Ginny came home from work earlier than usual. She was tired and had a sick headache. Looking at her lying in bed, I thought of the money I'd just given Claire and how part of it was Ginny's: this had always

tormented me but never so much as now. I told Ginny I wanted her to give the office notice. I didn't care if she did charity work, she had to quit that job. Though I know she wanted to, still she asked if we could afford it. When that threatened to start a quarrel, she said she definitely would.

A few days before VanPorter was to go on trial, an unemployed labourer named Walter Franks walked into headquarters, a little drunk but a lot more repentant, and claimed that he was the murderer of the hardware store owner. In headlining their stories the newspapers used quotes around "confessed", taking their cue from the police whose immediate reaction was to discount the man's story as a fabrication. The Commissioner of Police was quoted as saying he believed Franks to be a pathological liar and a publicity seeker, one of those people who for various twisted purposes confess to crimes they have not committed.

The following day Franks recanted his confession. Margolis however, publicly demanding a further investigation, was able to win a delay in the trial. The aftermath was a series of charges and counter-charges, Margolis accusing the police of negligence and worse, the police through unnamed spokesmen calling him "a follower of the Party line". But whether it was due to Margolis's needling or despite it, the officials soon announced that Franks had confessed again and was the actual murderer. When VanPorter's case came up, his acquittal was a formality, the judge praising the police for their devotion to the cause of justice.

About a week later Davenport called me. His voice was low, tense, troubled. He sounded sick. The magazine was being sued by VanPorter. For a hundred thousand dollars. The only defence *Squadcar* could offer, he said, was to prove that no malice was meant and that the story was based on facts obtained from police records. Davenport told me to be in New York by morning and to bring my notes and newspaper clippings. Everything, he emphasised, depended on me.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

D AVENPORT'S office was little more than a cubby-hole squeezed among many along the corridor that was the assembly line of Elliott Publications. Standing in the hall, I still didn't know what I was going to tell the man. I'd thought about it all night and on the plane and during the cab ride here, but yet I had nothing more than a vague hope that somehow, faced with whatever was to be, I would be able to bluff my way through. Lighting a fresh cigarette, I opened the door.

The editor was at his desk, staring vacantly toward the windows. He was a tall cadaverous looking man with bushy white hair and dark eyes set deep in their sockets and chalky skin pulled tight over prominent bones. He wore a dark shirt, open at the collar, the sleeves folded at the wrist; white braces curved over his thin shoulders. One of the first things my eyes took in as I entered the office was the framed letter hanging on the wall behind Davenport's desk: it was from an organisation of Mid-western police chiefs, commending *Squadcar* for its devotion to fact and for the part it played in bringing good police work to the attention of the public. Under the glass on his desk, I knew, was the motto: KEEP IT TRUE.

Davenport didn't notice or hear me right away. I took an uncertain step forward and he glanced around, startled. Then he smiled broadly. It was a smile of relief. He strode toward me, clutched my hand and led me to a chair. Sitting across from me now, he looked at me wordlessly; I think he wanted to speak but could not. Instead, with forced bravado, jaws set firm, he winked exaggeratedly to let me know he was still full of the old fight, and he raised and shook rigidly crossed fingers. But then there was a bubbling of emotion in him, his eyes became misty and his thin throat bobbed. I'd never seen him look so old.

"We're in a fight, Paul," he said huskily. Then his face became hard again, lower lip protruding. He held up a quivering fist, the veins showing in his wrist, and slammed it against the desk top. "But you know me when it comes to a fight, don't you, Paul,

boy? I love a good fight! The old man's not that old, eh?" He smiled fiercely and raised his fist. "They won't get a cent if I can help it! Not a damn red cent! I——" His voice trailed off. He reached for a cigarette with trembling fingers. He seemed to have difficulty holding it to his lips and he put it down. He played with the letter opener, saying nothing for a while: not aloud, that is, though once he shrugged like he was answering himself.

Then in a quiet strained voice, "A lot of people are happy about this, Paul." He looked up, nodded, then down once more. "There are a lot of jackals in this business, right in your own organisation, people hungry for your job, trying to make trouble. Jealous people waiting for you to make a slip so they can jump on you. You can do a job all your life, you can be a world-beater, but just let the going be rough and watch 'em hop on you." His eyes flared suddenly and his fists were clenched again. "But they got a long way to go to beat me! I'm a magazine man! I've been in the magazine business while they——" a finger "upstairs"—"while they were still in diapers! I know this business inside out! I'm a magazine man!" His voice lowered then and his eyes held fear, as though someone might overhear. "I give 'em a product, don't I, Paul? You know the way I am, you know how I only want the best. Only the best, right, Paul? Right?"

I nodded, avoiding his eyes.

"Look at this, for instance!" He fluttered open the dummy of the coming issue. He pointed to a story entitled "Please, No More Bullets for Grandma," and tapped his chest. "I was after this case for two months. There isn't an editor in this country, I'll bet you, who thought it had anything. But I *felt* it, I had my Chicago man *dig*! And goddam it, it's the hottest thing we've had in years. It'll sell magazines like hotcakes! But all my stories are tops, right, Paul?"

"That's right, Howard," I said quietly.

"You're a good friend, Paul." His hand went flat on mine, sending a chill curling through me. I wondered if he'd been drinking. "If a man has two or three good friends in this world, just two or three, he can count himself lucky. You've always been one of my dearest friends, Paul. I may be hard on you now and then, but it's always been to make you do better, eh, boy?" He took my silence for an answer. He went back in his chair. "I brought this magazine up to first place. They forget that.

People forget easily, don't they? They think it's luck, but damn it, I know how to sell magazines!" He pointed to the framed letter on the wall. "You remember when I got that, don't you? That's what the police think of me. And when you get a letter like that from those boys, you've really got something, eh, Paul?"

"Yes," I said.

He managed to light a cigarette.

"Conferences, conferences, that's all we've been doing since yesterday. My God, VanPorter's got a case all right, we've got to admit that, but we haven't lost yet, have we? That's what I keep telling upstairs, but they're running around like scared chickens. . . . The way I look at it, if we play our cards right, the most we'll have to do is maybe make some nuisance settlement to save us the bother of going to court." He crossed his fingers superstitiously. "Like I said on the phone, Paul, what we've got to do is prove that our story was based on facts. That's where you come in, boy. Now——"

Still trying to think, to come up with an excuse, a story . . .

"—now even that may not be a defence, but damn it, it probably would have a mitigating effect. It will establish, anyway, we weren't out to hurt VanPorter. It'll prove we weren't merely distorting truth for our own advantage but that all we did . . . with just a few harmless flourishes—" he waved the letter opener—"was to report concrete facts available to us at the time of the writing. Police facts! Hell, it isn't our fault the police were wrong, is it?" He put down the letter opener. Talking it out had reassured him. "I've gone through the story carefully, Paul, and picked out the points we'll have to prove. VanPorter's arrest and indictment are definitely on record, so we can forget about that."

"That's right," I said eagerly.

"But we will have to confirm that the police claimed he smokes or has smoked marihuana and that they found a revolver in his house which they thought to be the death gun. . . . You'll be able to establish that, won't you?"

I nodded, my face fiery.

"Good." Pleased, he puffed on his cigarette and set it down. "The detective who gave you the story—" he was taking this point for granted—"do you think if worse came to worst he'd appear as a witness for us?"

Still, still trying to think . . .

"Do you, Paul?"

"I doubt it, Howard."

"Why?" he frowned. And then, "Speak up, why?"

"Because it would probably mean his job. He gave me this story strictly on the q.t."

"Oh, hell!" Davenport pulled at his lower lip. Quickly, hopefully, "Could you get an affidavit from him covering those points? I don't necessarily mean for court, but just to show this fellow Margolis. It might help on a settlement, and—" he nodded that I could understand this—"and it would also help me save face upstairs."

"I could ask him. I can't promise you he'll do it, though."

"There'll be something in it for him."

"I'll have to talk to him . . . but I've got my doubts."

"Damn it to hell, Paul, we've got to do something! I've got to report to upstairs!" He was showing panic. "How about your notes, is it in your notes?"

"I remember him telling me—" I offered weakly.

"Remember? Remember? What good is remembering? We need it on paper!" He snapped his fingers irritably. "Let me see your notes." Frowning, "What're you sitting there for, let's see your notes!"

"... I don't have them."

"You don't *what*?" Hands flat on the desk, he raised himself a little. He sank back. "Where are those notes?" When I remained silent, he pounded the desk. "Paul, where are those notes?"

"I couldn't find them."

"Where are they? Damn it, damn it, man, where are they?"

I told him that I'd gone through my files but that Ginny or the maid—suddenly there was a maid—must have thrown them out. Davenport looked like he was going to collapse. His face had become grey.

"I—I looked everywhere," I said.

His eyes searched my face. His voice was vibrant but low. "Paul, are you telling me the truth?" I couldn't answer and he said in disbelief, "There was no detective, was there, Paul?"

I wanted to lie. Instead I shook my head and turned away.

"The marihuana? The gun?" There was a certain helplessness the way he said it. Louder now, "The marihuana? The gun? THE MARIHUANA? THE GUN?"

I kept shaking my head.

He stood up. I didn't watch him but I could hear the sound of his breathing, I could hear him pacing and then the squeak of the chair as he dropped into it. "Why did you do this to me?" he asked thinly. "Paul, why did you do this to me?"

I shrugged, still looking away. What could I say?

"Why? Why?"

"I needed the money."

"You could have asked me for an advance. You . . . you know I'd never turn you down. You could have asked me, YOU COULD HAVE ASKED ME!"

"I'm—I'm sorry. That's all I can say." I put my elbows on his desk and held my forehead.

"Sorry? Sorry?" He was standing again. I felt he might hit me and yet I did not move. "Sorry? Is that what you are, sorry? Y-you—" He sputtered and turned away. He walked to the window. He leaned against it, palms flat on the glass, and did not move. I could hear people shuffling in the corridor, pressing close to the door. "I trusted you," he said then. "If there was anyone in this world I trusted, it was you. It's a terrible, terrible thing losing faith in a person you've always trusted. It makes you feel kind of naked and stupid."

Raising my head, I wanted to cry out that he never really trusted anyone in his life and that, frightened, all he ever inspired was fear. I held back.

"There's something I want you to know," he went on. He sounded tired. "I want you to remember this, Paul. You were one person I always admired . . . even envied in a way . . . because I knew you were capable of doing things I'd always wanted to do. But the only thing worse than having just a little talent is having a great one and being false to it. So all you have now is my sympathy."

I got up. The things he said hurt and I wanted to hit back, to lose my own pain in the fury of hurting in turn.

"Confession time, Paul. For selfish reasons . . . yes, for selfish reasons, perhaps, I sort of made your future my own. I wanted to be able to say one day that I helped you a little on the way, that—that the things you learned here were good things and important to you. Oh, don't misunderstand me." He came around and there was no anger on his face, which made it worse. "You'll still probably make a name for yourself, but I don't think I'll want any credit for that. I don't want any credit

for teaching you to lie and cheat. Now—" he turned to the window again—"now get out."

The way he stood there, his quiet voice, infuriated me. I would have felt better if he'd kept yelling. I said, "You listen to me first—" I knew I should stop. I wanted to.

He shook his head that he didn't want to hear.

"You *will* listen to me," I said louder.

"I want you to go, Paul."

"Damn it, you will listen!" I shouted. I became almost incoherent in rage. "Learn from you? That's the funniest thing I've heard yet! Do you want to know what I learned from you? I learned how to type with two hands and my mind somewhere else! And talking about being false to my talent, what do you think I was being when I wrote for you? What do you think goes into your damn magazine—literature? You would! You're so smug and self-righteous it stinks! You read a piece of tripe and you call it a lulu! Top-drawer, lulu—I almost threw up every time I heard that! You don't even have sense enough to know the kind of crap you're publishing! At least I know when I'm hacking and I don't kid myself! But you . . . you live in a dream world! Wake up and see what you really are! You're nothing but a goddam hack editor!"

He swayed a little.

"Do you want to hear more? There's more if you want to hear!"

"Get out." He said it in a low intense voice. "Get out, get out, get out!"

I spun and headed toward the door. A shadow on the frosted glass, one of the secretaries, moved away hurriedly.

"Wait!"

Davenport was facing me. His shoulders sagged. "I just want you to know you've probably cost me my job here . . . I want to thank you for that."

"Don't mention it!" I slammed the door behind me.

Ginny wasn't home when I arrived from the airport: although she'd given the office notice a couple of weeks before, she'd been asked to stay on until the end of this week. I went straight to the phone and called Dan, but he wasn't in. Now that I wouldn't be selling to *Squadcar* any more, I had to build up what I'd always considered to be secondary markets, to make myself as important to those editors as I'd been to Davenport. My financial

needs were greater than ever, what with Ginny giving up her job and Claire still a part of my life. What I was anxious to discuss with Dan was the possibility of his quitting his job right away and going into the full-time production of detective stories on an assembly-line basis. I envisioned a writing factory of several employees that would give me the security I had to have.

Ginny came in about six. All she knew of my trip to New York was that I'd had to see Davenport "about a story". She asked how it had gone and I said fine. While she prepared dinner, I went through the *Squadcars* in my files to see what stories Dan and I could rewrite. My plan was to start one that night. Ginny called from the kitchen to ask if I remembered she had an art class that evening and I said I did and she said oh, she'd wondered.

During dinner, trying obviously to be casual, she told me she'd called her mother that morning. This surprised me, since they hadn't spoken since our elopement.

"I wanted to find out how they were," she said with a trace of apology.

"And . . . how are they?"

"Fine." She seemed relieved by my attitude. "Daddy wasn't well for a while and Mother . . . well, Mother seems to be Mother." She hesitated. "She asked for you, Paul."

"No! What brought that on?"

"She just did. She said you must be doing rather well and then . . . and then she asked how you are."

"What's this about my doing well?"

"It was just that I told her I was giving up my job and . . . well, well that's when she said it."

This gave me a strange feeling of pleasure and I realised how much I actually wanted acceptance by her family. In a good mood, I told Ginny my plans for opening an office with Dan. But instead of being pleased, she frowned and lowered her fork.

"Why are you doing that, Paul?"

"What do you mean 'why'? Dan's going to help me, that's why. In fact he's done quite a few stories for me already. I'm planning a big thing and the way I figure it we'll need more room than the apartment. I've got a few ideas about getting a secretary and——"

"And the book?" This, tonelessly.

"The book? Oh, I'll work on the book."

She raised her fork, then set it aside again. Her eyebrows were pinched. "I don't like it, Paul."

"Don't like what?"

"This thing with Dan, your being with him, your getting more involved in this detective . . . this detective business."

"Just leave everything to me," I tried to brush it off.

"But I think it's important we talk about it."

"What," I said with a forced show of patience, "do you want me to do?"

"I want you to do what you've planned all along. I want you to give up the detective writing instead of getting into it deeper. I don't think you're happy——"

"And what—" I enunciated each word—"do we live on?"

"We've gone through this before, haven't we? We'll get along."

"We'll get along, we'll get along! Do you know what the devil you're saying?"

"Paul, there's no reason to raise your voice."

"But *do* you know what you're saying? How do we get along? Where? How? My God, you talk like a baby! Am I a criminal because I've got a sense of responsibility toward you?"

"I didn't mean that, I didn't mean that," she kept shaking her head.

"Then what *do* you mean? I don't think you even know! You're happy enough about quitting your job, aren't you? In fact you had to call your mother just to prove your husband isn't the bum she thought he was. I'm right, aren't I?"

Her face went white. She looked like she wanted to run from the table.

"I know damn well I'm right! And you like that piano, don't you? And you like to eat and you like to dress and go out. That takes money, doesn't it? Even that art school . . . you have to pay for that, too, don't you? And some day we want a family, don't we? How do you go about that? It takes money! So if my crime is wanting to give you everything, I can't do anything but plead guilty!"

She started to say something but changed her mind. We ate in silence. She picked at her food and then took away a half-full plate. I went to the living-room. She came out later and walked to the door. I looked up from my typewriter and asked where she was going. To school, she said in a clipped voice. I stood up and

said I'd take her. She said never mind, she'd go by trolley. I said I wanted to take her and she didn't answer but merely waited for me. While driving, I said something like it would be nice if she had her own car. She didn't answer. I came back with what was wrong with her having her own car?

I parked in front of the school. She moved to open her door, then stopped. "Paul, we're doing things wrong. We're going in the wrong direction."

Again? More?

"You were right," she said. "I guess I didn't realise that I called Mother just to tell her I wasn't working. I guess I was trying to prove something . . . but it's wrong. Do you know what I actually planned all along, Paul? I planned to call her only when your book was finished and they'd accepted it. That's when I planned to call her. . . . But we're falling into a trap, Paul. Both of us. And it's so easy to fall into it, too. . . . Paul," she said after a pause, "that time Mother spoke to you before we were married, about going into the business with Daddy, why didn't you accept?"

"What are you bringing that up for?" But I knew: I didn't want to think about it.

"Paul, that's the boy I loved, the boy who wanted to be on his own, the boy who was cynical only in the way people with ideals can be. Remember all the plans we made, what we were going to do, what we were going to get out of life? What's happening to them, Paul? Paul, believe me in this. I—I didn't marry you for the things you could give me. I could have married anyone for that. But you stood for something. An ideal, a dream. . . . But we're heading in a direction neither of us wanted to go. We're being tempted by a lot of material things that . . . that don't necessarily lead to happiness. Of course we need things, we have to be realistic, but we don't have to go overboard where things of themselves become all that matters. . . . Do I make sense? I—I feel like I sound mixed up. Paul, we don't have to be the richest people in the world to be the happiest. In fact . . . lately . . . we're bickering, we don't have fun the way we used to, we don't do crazy things, you don't joke any more. . . . Paul, it's easy to be tempted by things, but if they're only going to lead to shallow mediocre lives, do we want them? Of course I want a family, of course I want all that, but it's got to be part of a rich, full life. I don't want regrets—your sacrificing a talent, my thinking I stood by while you sacrificed it. If I thought you could be happy

this way, maybe it would be different, but you'll never be and some day you'll hate me for it. . . . Paul, the important thing is for you to do your work, the work you should do. We can keep our standard of living down. I—I don't have to quit my job. It's my fault I wanted to. I blame myself. And if you're going into this detective thing with Dan, you might just as well be working for my father, can't you see? Let's keep fighting it, Paul. It's too easy to fall into the trap. And we're falling . . . both of us." She swallowed. "Th-that's all I wanted to say." She opened the door and hurried out. She walked away quickly. I watched her. I don't know how much time passed before I started the motor.

Instead of going back to the apartment, I drove to Claire's. I needed the opiate and the assurance of her arms. I had to lose myself in them.

In the corridor, I could hear Claire's radio playing and I opened the door without knocking. The living-room was dark but a light was on in the bedroom and I headed there. But I got no farther than the doorway. And what I saw were Claire and John Rockey on the bed and Claire had her head on his stomach and his crutches were on the floor. John saw me first but all he did was raise himself on his elbows and Claire turned slowly and blinked a couple of times, and I could see John smiling a little. I walked forward in a stupor, although I wanted to run away, and now I was standing above them and all I could think to do was spit on them, in their faces, and then I hurried out, stopping only to spit once more on the floor.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I DROVE about a block and had to stop the car, for my brain felt wrapped in velvet. Then gradually a great numbness seemed to be leaving me, like a tooth that has been deadened and starts to throb. In my mind I was standing in Claire's bedroom, staring at the unbelievable ugliness before me. The loathsomeness of it caused a shrivelling within me. I held my temples, fingers pressed into my scalp. Ugly! Ugly! Oh, how I hated her! Oh, how I despised . . . myself! Yes, myself. Even more than I hated her, I hated myself . . . for caring, for caring at all. Why should I even care? Goddam it, why should I? Who was she? A stupid slut! That's all she was. Who was she to me? A no-good bitch who—And yet it did hurt, it sickened me and hurt me! I didn't want it to, I fought against it . . . but still it cut deep.

. . . But it mustn't! I mustn't let it. In fact I should be glad. Shouldn't I be glad? It couldn't have gone on for ever. It had to end. I wouldn't have been able to end it myself. I knew that. I'd been too weak and it could have gone on for years. But this . . . thank God this finished it! The slut, the bastard slut! She'd been with me the night her husband had died! God, that should have made me realise! Had I been out of my mind, had I been crazy thinking . . . it had been me?

Yet it . . . still hurt. Of all people, Rockey! Oh, that bitch, that no good——

And because of her, because of that bitch, I'd . . . I'd drifted from Ginny. I'd drifted from someone I loved. Who loved me. Ginny who loved me, Ginny who didn't want me to . . . sacrifice my talents, who wanted me only to be true . . . to myself. Oh, Jesus, because of that bitch! *Paul, we're falling into a trap . . . both of us.* Because of that bitch!

Yes, I was glad now! Thank God . . . I thank you, God, you let me see with my own eyes! If I hadn't seen, I might have gone on . . . for years . . . just like this, getting deeper into the trap, drifting further from Ginny, selling myself out so completely I'd never be able to go back. Now I could go back. There still

was time. You could start again, couldn't you? (Ginny, we'll find ourselves yet. There is time. Finished with Claire. Good, good! I couldn't write for Davenport any more. That was good too! The forced break. All around a forced break. Dan, the hell with you, Dan, I'm sick of selling myself out. I've got a book and a contract and I've got good things within me and a wife to help me and, damn it, I'm glad, goddam it I'm glad!

. . . I started the motor.

Oh, how ugly, how ugly!

I got up before Ginny the next morning, eager to get at the book. Despite myself, my sleep had been a tortured one and filled with images of Claire and John; but now my mind was clear. I wanted to work. I must lose myself in work, in good work.

But the sight of the manuscript brought a puncturing of enthusiasm.

Although my intentions had been to work "leisurely" on the novel between detective stories, I hadn't touched it in weeks; hadn't even thought about it. And now I was afraid of it. I couldn't remember where I'd left off, I had no idea where or how to begin. I felt like someone whose legs are freed of casts and he stands uncertain, trying to recall the process of walking.

Worried, I scanned the pages haphazardly, deliberately putting off thought of the job ahead. There were twelve chapters altogether, which was about a third of the book. Were they good? They *had* to be. But were they? As always the temptation was to go back and read. I warned myself against it as I'd done so many times before. I even put down the manuscript, only to take it up again and continue my scanning: at first a few lines on each page, then paragraphs and then finally the slow reading of each page in turn.

I read to find encouragement to go on; instead, finished, I sat with the pages on my lap, trying to blunt the edges of panic.

Somewhere I'd failed and cupping a hand over my forehead I tried frantically to figure out where. The second cigarette of the morning was in my lips. I tugged at the flesh under my chin, set the cigarette in the ash tray and went back to the manuscript. This time I knew what was wrong. But the knowledge brought no comfort.

The trouble was not in the first seven chapters. They were good. They had feeling, they had warmth and intensity. A fury

was in the writing there. The last five chapters however were pages of words and little more. While carrying the story-line along mechanically, these chapters lacked depth and genuine emotion; the characters were names, not people; the writing was strained, tired. A wide chasm separated the chapters. The parts might have been written by two different people.

The fringe of panic crept closer.

Ginny came into the room. She said "good morning" but I was too troubled to turn around. I felt her staring at me and then sensed rather than heard her walk away. Later she called me in for breakfast. She had to call three times.

I remained at the kitchen table long after she'd gone to work. I dreaded going back to my desk. The book was like a monster waiting for me. I poured myself another cup of coffee and took my time over it, smoking fitfully. Trying to solve the problem, I couldn't push beyond the wall of the problem itself. Maybe, I thought, maybe I was being too critical, too analytical; things might not be as bad as I imagined. It was always that way, wasn't it? I took a quick sip of coffee. Too critical. I'd always been my own harshest critic; in fact wasn't that why I hadn't wanted to read the manuscript until I was through the first draft? Of course. I should realise how I was. Draining the cup, I hurried back to the living-room.

At my desk, I put the first seven chapters in a drawer. These I wouldn't have to touch; these were perfect. The last five now. I flattened the edges against the desk. Then I riffled the pages. I started to reread them. This time I only got past a chapter and a half. Slamming the pages on the desk, I stood up. Had I written *that*? I went to the window. I came back. I took the chapters in my hands. The impulse came over me to tear them up. I fought it off and sat down, pushing the pages away from me. A part of me said to continue writing without caring, another part cried out that I had to go back, I had to do over what was shabby and sloppy. I went for a cigarette but dropped the pack. Then I reached out and grabbed the pages, crumbling them in my fist as I drew them to me. I began tearing them, tearing them into long strips, quicker each time and more frenziedly, like the early forward thrusts of a locomotive. I gathered the pieces in both hands and flung them toward the wastepaper basket, scattering some on the floor. Good! Done! Clean out the rot and start over! I sank a fresh sheet of paper into the roller. I cracked my knuckles, pressed fingers against my forehead to squeeze out a

thought, held my hands poised over the keys—and then sank back. A sweat had broken out over my body.

I got up, staring at the scattered pieces on the floor. Why had I done that? The thing to do had been to go on, to set words down in any form, to worry^a about the niceties of writing later. What was wrong with me? Leaning against the desk, I grasped the edges on either side of me. I rubbed my cheek on my shoulder. Maybe not right away, I calmed myself, maybe not even today at all, but tomorrow or the next day for cert^ain I'd work on the book again. I'd do it right. I'd catch the tone and quality of the earlier chapters and I'd work slowly and write it beautifully. . . . But was the writing itself the trouble? This was a new thought, and a frightening one. Was the chasm in the book due only to the writing, to the use perhaps of weak words and sentences instead of stronger ones? Or was it . . . was it that it had become a task rather than a purpose; that the person who wrote the last five chapters no longer believed in the book, in the importance of it, in the importance of doing other books—no longer considered the struggle worth it, no longer . . . no longer had anything to say? Had I drifted too far to care, within me really to care?

No, it wasn't that! It must not be that! It was just that I was tired, I was trying too hard. The analogy of the casts once more: I'd been away from good writing too long and before you could run you first had to walk. Easy now, easy. Walk first before you run. What I had to do was write a fiction story before going back to the book. I had to find the embers first before I could have the fire; and yet it was so long since I'd even plotted a story. But I'd write a good short story. Let's see. A short story. What kind of plot would sell? Boy meets girl, confronted by obstacle, gets over obstacle. The good old slick formula. Without realising it, I bit off a piece of thumbnail. Tripe! Was that all I could think of—tripe?

The thought that came creeping into my mind now was one I battled to keep out, and yet it came on relentlessly: I could not write. I did not have the patience, the drive, nor even the ability any more. I'd had these things once and I'd let them rot. Just as I'd tried to divide my emotions between Ginny and Claire, so in false logic had I attempted to split my brain in half, and in both I'd failed completely and utterly: in division the good had withered. I had wallowed in filth and expected to rise up clean; I'd sold myself and believed I could flick off the chains.

Lost, everything lost! My head seemed to be swelling. Lost, lost, everything lost! Too late to go back, too late to recapture what I'd had and had no more. Lost, lost, for ever lost! The past dead and the future lost!

The apartment compressed me; I felt it was closing in on me. I had to go out for air. I went to the door. Half way down the steps the phone rang. I kept walking. When I reached the vestibule it stopped. I opened the outside door and stood there. It was a cool grey day. The phone began ringing again. I looked up the stairs. The phone was insistent. I took the steps up slowly. I picked up the receiver. It was Ginny. She sounded upset. She'd read something terrible in the paper while coming to work and she'd called as soon as she could. Had I *heard*? Heard what, I demanded. About Davenport. Davenport was dead. He'd committed suicide. He'd leaped to his death yesterday evening from the sixteenth floor of the Elliott Publications Building.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WASN'T it terrible, Paul, wasn't it a tragedy? She'd never even talked to the man and yet she felt that someone had died whom she'd known all her life. So she could imagine what a shock it must be to me. After all, we'd been such good friends; and then, too, I'd only seen him yesterday. Why did I think he killed himself? The newspaper story—it had only been a squib on one of the back pages—had quoted Mrs. Davenport as saying her husband had not been in ill health; then what could it have been? Had he looked depressed? Had he said anything to me? . . .

“—Paul?”

“I'm here, Ginny.” Dead? Davenport dead?

“Do you want me to come home now? You sound so——”

“No——” Davenport dead?—“no, I'm all right.”

“I'll be home as early as I can, darling . . . Paul?”

“What is it, what is it?” I didn't have the patience, the strength, to talk.

“I'll be home early,” she said again, though she'd probably meant to say something else.

When she hung up I didn't realise it right away and kept holding the receiver. Then, putting it down, I sat at my desk, one cold hand over the other. For a while the only thought I had was that I must not think.

No, I must not think. I stood up and went to the window and half-sat on the radiator. In the middle of the street was a puddle of muddy water: that's how he must have looked from the building, a small wet huddled blob below.

And I had killed him.

Whether he had been afraid for his job or whether with the taunt of hack editor I had smashed his world—whichever it was, fear or disillusionment, that had driven him to suicide, I was the trigger of it and I might just as well have pushed him out that window. Cry, you son of a bitch, cry! Why couldn't I cry? I remembered what Claire Crisponi had told me the night her husband was to die, about how she'd never been able to cry, and

all at once it seemed right that rotten people should not have the relief of tears. And it was my rottenness that had killed Davenport, and it was right I should not be able to cry. A good friend. He was a good friend and I had killed him. I pressed knuckles against my forehead, afraid suddenly for my mind. Good friend, dear friend, forgive me, forgive me! I could feel the tears now, sliding down my cheeks. Soon I was crying as I'd never before cried in my life, and after it was over I wondered if I had wept for Davenport or for myself.

Perhaps it was a minute later, perhaps an hour, but a cab was parked at the kerb and I had not seen it pull up nor did I even know it was there until the driver stepped out and opened the rear door and stuck his head in and then brought it out and stood there wondering what to do. A crutch emerged and then a leg with a brace on it and then another crutch and another braced leg, and now a huge backside wiggled and squirmed its way out like a gigantic beast from a cocoon. It was John Rockey. He paid off the driver and looked up: I pulled back from the window in a cold rush of alarm. It took a gathering of courage to peer down again. Rockey was swinging himself toward the front door.

I hurried out to the hall. I could hear the long creaking of the outside door opening and then the closing. I wanted to run down but some kind of a dread held me. Rockey was standing at the bottom of the staircase now. He grinned up at me. Then he turned and started to come up backwards. It was a grotesque chilling sight; there was a swelling of horror within me as I looked on. He would put one crutch on the step behind him and somehow draw up a leg and then he would bring up the other crutch and the other leg, twisting and swaying from side to side, now and then resting against the wall. His breathing was heavy, laboured. He kept coming up and still I could not move. He was only a few feet away from me. I wanted to press my hands against his back and push him down. Instead I stepped away. At the top, he pivoted to face me. He was hunched forward on his crutches. He wore a thin lumber-jacket, the zipper open, and his throat and face were red. He was breathing through his mouth. He sniffed and swallowed mucus. Then without another look at me he worked his way forward and entered the open door of the apartment. There, just inside the foyer, he rested on one crutch and sneeringly waved me in with the other. He frightened me. There was nothing he could do to me and yet he frightened me.

I said, "What do you want?"

"I want to talk. C'mere," and again he motioned with the crutch.

I walked in slowly, staying a distance from him. With the tip of his crutch he swung the door shut behind me. I looked at the closed door, then, at him.

"What do you want? What did you come here for?"

He didn't answer right away. He was enjoying this. His tongue slid over his teeth. Bent forward, his head appeared propped by the crutches. The smile left his lips. "I come here to spit on you, buddy. It cost me a buck forty-five just to come here an' spit on you like you spit on me."

"Get out of here." I was less angry than frightened.

"Bull." The smile came back and he sniffed again and swallowed. "You didn't like what you saw last night, did you? You should'a seen your face. Huh!" He wet his teeth with his tongue once more and nodded with a wink. "Claire liked it though. She told me she liked it."

Davenport dead, I'd killed Davenport, I couldn't write, I'd forgotten how to write, and now this! Enough? Enough?

"Rockey," I said, eyes shut and shaking my head, "get out of here."

"Sure . . . sure," he said in a slow easy voice. "Sure, I'll get out. Just lemme finish what I come to say. I got lots to tell you, buddy . . . Remember that night you come around an' asked me where Claire was? You know where she was? Right in my room, doin' just what you saw. That sorta makes you an' me cousins, don't it?" He laughed, his shoulders shaking, and then pawed his lips. "That's what they say, anyway."

I ran to the door. I opened it. With a quick thrust of the crutch he closed it.

"Take it easy, take it easy. I got lots more to say. . . . Cuz, I don't know why you got sore in the first place. Don't you believe in sharin' the wealth? Hell, I was one of the first an' Chris' I never got sore. I was way ahead of you. Hell, I was even ahead of that Peterson guy and yet——"

I stared at him unbelievably, not certain I'd heard right, hoping I'd heard wrong. "Which Peterson? . . . Rockey," I demanded, "which Peterson?"

"Which one do you think?"

"The . . . one . . . the man her husband murdered?"

"You got it, I guess I'm the only guy who knew. I seen him come in onc'."

"And—" "I was shaking my head—" "and you never told the police?"

"Me? You nuts? Why the heck should I? Claire's always been good to me an' I ain't out to spoil a good thing. Anyway I'm willin' to live an' let live——"

Peter Crisponi dying in the electric chair, saying he had killed for money. Why? And the dim memory of a letter from the death house—*forgive as you would have others forgive you*. And this carrion here, this twisted carrion, knowing all the time, letting a man die. . . .

"—an' I don't go around spittin' on people just 'cause they do what I been doin'. I ain't like you," he snarled. "I don't think I'm that high an' mighty I can go around spittin' on people who do what I do. . . . Who the hell you think you are anyway? Huh, who the heck are you? You got a pair of good legs, that make you better? Lemme tell you, lemme tell you somethin', you ain't that fancy, you ain't that hot! You're no goddam better'n I am! You bastard, you crumb . . . spit on me?"

"Rockey . . . Rocky, get out of here!"

"You wear hot-shot clothes, you got a fancy place here, you can *walk*, that make you better'n me? Bull, buddy! I ain't slop you can spit on! I'm as good as you any day! Any goddam day of the week! . . . You should'a heard Claire tell me stuff. You should hear what a creep she thinks you are . . . Haw! Why . . . you . . . dirty . . . bastard!"

My talent dead, Davenport dead, I'd lied to Ginny and I'd cheated on her; and now this, to hear this?

"You're no better'n me, get it?"

I grabbed him by the arm and tried to pull him to the door. He tottered but put his hands on my chest and pushed me off. He had a tremendous amount of strength in his arms. I fell against the wall. I leaned there, my chest heaving and burning.

"You don't feel so high class no more, do you, cousin? How's it feel knowin' you kissed me, huh? Huh, cousin' how's it feel?"

A fluid was leaving my brain; I could feel it draining away. He kept taunting me, repeating over and over I was no better than he . . . and it was true, it was all true, I was as crippled as he, in my own way I was just as crippled, I was as ugly and rotten, as twisted and distorted. I was as filthy, I was as corroded, I was as evil and loathsome. True, all of it; I was no good, I

was foul, depraved, and I had lied, I had cheated . . . and I had killed. All of it true and yet I didn't want to hear, I didn't want to know, I wanted to shut off the voice, *I had to shut off the voice.*

"Rockey . . . get . . . get out of here, get out of here! I—I——"

He spat on me then and the spittle ran down my cheek and I wiped it off and looked at it on the back of my hand. He spat on me again. He called me names, he said now did I still think I was better? He poked at me with his crutch and there was a roaring in my head like a subway train bellowing into a station. I grabbed the crutch and tore it out of his hand. I swung with all my strength, blindly and crazily I swung, and there was a jolt and a groan and the crutch almost fell out of my grasp. Rockey sank heavily to the floor; he was on his buttocks, blood streaming down the side of his head, and then he toppled backwards. He was lying on the floor, arms and legs fluttering like a crab that's been placed on its back. He was not John Rockey any more: he was evil itself, all the evil I'd feared, all the evil I'd known and hated. He had become the sum of depravity, my own depravity, and I had to destroy it before it destroyed me, I had to stamp it out. I swung, I swung again and again. The thing on the floor, it would not die. It turned, it wiggled, it went on its side, on one elbow, it bled, it made noise, it reached for me, it tried to bite my legs and claw at me. It had to die, it had to be dead beyond death, it must never come to life again! I smashed at it beyond count and knowing, and what was coming out of me was like black pus from a sore, the fester, and I swung, draining it, until the thing on the floor was motionless, until what had been in me was in me no more; and then I dropped the crutch and fell on my knees and spread my hands over my face, not sorry, not sorry yet, breathing hard and even feeling clean; but I knew I must not uncover my eyes.

I knew I must not uncover my eyes, that fury-emptied I must not see this thing, that I would only remain clean until I saw. I kept breathing into my hands, the warmth of it on my face. Then there was a tumultuous pounding at the door. I glanced up in a gust of terror.

"Paul, are you in there, are you all right?" It was Dr. Michaels, my landlord.

I stared at the door, unable to get off my knees, unable to answer.

"Paul, are you all right?"

"I—I'm okay." I struggled up a little only to sink back.

"You sure? I heard something fall."

"It—" still trying to get up—"it was only the lamp."

I saw the knob turning and remembered that the door was not locked. Trying to reach it and throw myself against it, I waddled forward on my knees, arms waving to maintain my balance—but it was already opening. I fell, arms outstretched. I kept my head on the floor, not daring to look up.

"Paul, what's wrong with this darn thing?"

I raised my head. The door had opened less than half a foot, for John Rockey's body, clamped between it and the wall, held it back. Dr. Michaels's hand reached in. I staggered up, I wanted to hit it with something.

"What the devil's wrong with this door?"

"The rug . . . the rug's stuck under it."

"Do you need me?"

"No, please go away!"

"Oh? . . . Well, thank *you*!" His hand slid out and I could hear him mumbling to himself as he went down the stairs.

I closed the door and sagged against it, fumbling for the key in the lock, somehow finding and twisting it. My body was soaked and shaking. I clung to the door for minutes, first trying to grow calm, then seeking courage to turn around. I pushed myself away from it, spun and fell heavily against it, keeping my gaze on the ceiling, afraid to look down, wishing I never had to look down. Gradually my eyes lowered and a fresh and even more violent trembling came over me. The thing on the floor did not appear at once, but in a shimmering way like a reflection on water; and what I saw then was no longer the sum of anything evil, not my own wickedness dead, nothing even that I loathed any more, but what had been a human being, a man.

John Rockey was lying face up, one leg bent, the other stretched out, arms flung over his head. His face was smashed, eyes closed and battered, nose split and raw, lips torn, puffed and bleeding, hair sticky and matted against a savage hole in his forehead. The bloody crutch, splintered lengthwise, was tilted against his chest. I had done this? *Me*? My stomach heaved and I vaulted the body and ran toward the bathroom, cupping my mouth. There, as I retched, my guts seemed to be writhing out of me and sweat oozed from every pore. The one arm I held against the wall for support shook and kept bending at the elbow. I straightened and then became sick again. Once more I pushed

myself up, weak, so terribly weak, and washed my face and hands and saw blood in the sink: my palm had been gashed by the breaking crutch. My face in the mirror was as white as flour. There was a palm-print of blood on the wall from my cut hand and I wiped my face and the wall with a towel. A pink blotch still remained on the wall. I dropped the towel and sat on the edge of the tub, biting my nails, pulling at my moist fingers, then stood up, moved to go out, stopped, wondered how I could go out there, how I could look at the body again, kept asking myself what to do, where I could turn, who I could call. There was a warm wetness on my thighs but I could not help it. I began to cry. What had I done, what had I done? These hands, what had they done? And what . . . what was I going to do?

Crying brought a degree of comfort and I wiped my eyes on my sleeve. I would call Ferguson. Yes, I would call my good friend Ferguson. I would tell him, I would tell the other detectives, "You know me, you know I would never murder anyone. This was just something that happened and it could happen to anyone." That was it. I'd killed a man but I hadn't murdered him, and there was a difference. Murder was something you planned, murder was something you had inside you. This was altogether different. This was the kind of thing you could explain away and all would be well. And the police . . . the police, they'd understand and they'd even let me go, not right away maybe but sooner or later, for they knew me and that I'd never deliberately hurt anyone. If anything they'd even feel sorry that such a thing had happened to me. Of course! Everything would be all right. Eventually, anyway. It wasn't as if I'd murdered a man . . . murder was something else. Murders were committed by vicious people for vicious reasons. I was Paul Weiler and never in my life would I murder anyone! . . . Why, I'd never even collected a traffic ticket! And the police would believe what I told them, they'd know it was true, they'd realise, they'd understand: they *knew* me! For this they didn't put people in jail or send them to the electric chair. They only did that to people who were dangerous. *Murderers*. Men and women with murder in their hearts who couldn't be allowed to walk the streets for they'd only kill again . . . the kind of people who'd shoot a child through the heart or strangle an old woman, who'd murder for money or some other planned motive. They were beyond the human scale, these people, *they were the ones!*

I walked out of the bathroom and into the living-room and

headed stiff-legged toward the phone. I picked up the receiver. I held it without dialling. Doubts. Fear. The hum of the phone and doubts and fear. How could I say it happened? Rockey had taunted me until I'd gone insane for a minute? Or lie . . . self-defence perhaps. That wasn't too much of a lie. He'd poked at me with the crutch, hadn't he? Who could tell what else he might have done? But no matter what, the important thing was informing the police . . . I dialled the number. The number I'd dialled so many times before. Other people's crimes. A voice said, "Police Headquarters," and I asked for the Detective Bureau and was more afraid . . . They'd want to know who this John Rockey was, wouldn't they? . . . Another voice, this one from the Detective Bureau, and I told it . . . I told it to give me the Homicide Squad.

What could I tell them when they asked who John Rockey was?

"Homicide, Lieutenant Thompson."

"I . . . let me . . . I want to talk to Detective Ferguson." From habit I'd muffled my voice. Thompson who didn't like me. I'd forgotten about Thompson. I'd forgotten they weren't all my friends.

"Hold on."

They'd ask who John Rockey was and I'd have to tell them.

"Ferguson." The familiar gruff voice.

"Mr. . . . Ferguson?" Cold, so cold and afraid.

"That's right."

And when they found out about Rockey, it would lead them to Claire. Everything would be exposed, everyone would know! . . . And Ginny! Oh, Lord, Ginny must never know! She must never learn I'd cheated on her!

"Hello? . . . This is Ferguson! Hello!"

Headlines in the papers . . . pictures . . . scandal . . . jails and lawyers . . . Thompson who didn't like me . . . the black unknown that was the future . . . and my parents, this would kill my parents . . . and my little sister . . . friends . . . Ginny—Ginny! . . . her parents, her mother especially . . . the end of everything, even if I were released, still the end . . . ruined, I was through, my life done . . . once I gave myself up, my life done . . . the precious, precious life. . . .

"Hello there!" Ferguson was clicking the phone.

I set the receiver on the hook. Gently. I held my hand on it for a few seconds, wondering if Ferguson had recognised my voice.

Should I call back and say I'd been disconnected and make believe I was after a story? I couldn't do that. Surely something would give me away; I couldn't think that logically now. Anyway he probably didn't know who it was, and even if he did, what did that mean? There was nothing to suspect. No one even knew John Roakey was dead. What I had to do was get rid of the body, the body behind me, the body I was afraid to look at. The dead always did frighten me and I hated funerals and the sight of a hearse or a house with a wreath on its door; and yet I had to touch that bloody grisly thing, I had to get it out of the house.

Steeling myself, I went to the foyer. I looked at the body a long time, deliberately a long time, trying to get used to it, fighting down the churning of my stomach, muscles straining against the impulse of flight. What could I do, where could I hide it? . . . My car! My car in the garage. But afterwards? Get it there first and worry about that later. Just get it out of here before Ginny came home. Hadn't she said she'd be home early? . . . But how could I carry Roakey out? I was trapped on the second floor of the house in broad daylight and was going to pieces under the pounding waves of onrushing hysteria. I ran from room to room, peering out windows, opening closets and drawers, not knowing what I was looking for but losing myself in movement. A blanket? I pulled one from a closet. I'd wrap the body in this and somehow drag it . . . in daylight? With Dr. Michaels in his apartment? . . . Calm, grow calm! I lighted a cigarette, using several matches. My palm had stopped bleeding but there were stains on my pants. I had to steady myself; if I didn't want to be caught I had to steady myself. *I must not be caught!* Think! Think, take hold of yourself, think! . . . The basement? Anything there? A trunk, a large carton? I hurried downstairs.

The basement was dark and damp. I scoured it. No trunk, but there was an old cedar chest. I couldn't handle it, though. Cartons? Several small ones filled with newspaper. Nothing big enough. I rushed upstairs and locked myself in the apartment. Alone with the body. I inched my way around it. Was it starting to smell? Imagination . . . not yet . . . too soon . . . it could take days. I'd go mad if I had to be with it much longer, and yet in a way I wished for madness, sudden and complete, full, wild and happy. Anything so I would not have to care any more or think or fear. I strode back and forth. . . . What was that? I thought I'd heard a door bang shut downstairs. The outer door. I rushed

to the window. Dr. Michaels was walking down the street. This . . . this would be my only chance, this and no other! I had no idea how long the doctor would be gone, if he'd left for the day or for a few minutes, but I had to use this time. I whirled, biting my thumb. How? *Any way!* Any way at all . . . drag it, carry it, anything, just get it out of here! But I had to cover the body with something. The blanket! I ran to where I'd left it on the floor, gathered it up and rushed back. I pressed down on the body's one upraised knee, straightening the leg. Now for the outflung arms. Gritting my teeth, battling against nausea, I lowered the arms and then jumped up as though to run. There was a noise in my head like seashells held against my ears. I threw the blanket over the body, tucked it under, strained to get the body up and folded the blanket around the back and then the front again. It was a pink fluffy affair and made an incongruous shroud. Within seconds dark red oozed through the pink.

I hurried back to the closet to get another blanket. . . . A better idea. The shower curtain . . . to contain the blood. But the hooks holding the curtain on the railing defied my fingers; minutes passed before I had the thing free. I flung the curtain over the blanket and struggled to get it under and around. I knew I should tie it, but there was no time.

Unlocking the hall door, I looked down the stairs. I must not speculate on the danger. It had to be done and that was all. Coming back, I dug my hands under the body and tried to lift it. I could not. The strength was gone from me. My arms were paralysed and numb. I strained but could not move it. Getting up, I circled the body, wiping my drenched face on my sleeve. *I had to!* Perhaps I could drag it. I grabbed the two ends of the covering, at feet and head, brought them together and wrapped them around my wrists. I tugged. The thing came slowly. It got stuck in the doorway and I grasped it by the head and pulled: something gave and I thought *God, the head's coming off!* I leaped over the body and pushed. It slid out to the hall, to the edge of the staircase. I turned it lengthwise, head facing the stairs. I went down a few steps, under it. Supporting it on my chest, I pulled and tugged. Gradually it came forward. I was on my knees, taking each step at a time, pulling, holding back. A few steps from the floor it became too much and I let go and it bumped down and rested, legs pointed upward, head at an angle. I looked behind at the front door. Any second

I expected it to fly open. With my knees for support, I raised the head and back, bear-hugged the chest and brought it down all the way. Now it was lying on the floor, braced legs uncovered. Panting, I wrapped them again. Desperation made me strong. Clutching the ankles, I dragged the body along the corridor to the rear door where I stopped, feeling faint. I had to wait a few seconds, on one knee and breathing hard. Then I opened the door and looked out.

A small alley led to the garage, to safety. I walked down the steps and peered around. No one was in the driveway, no one in any of the yards. I went inside. Someone might come out at any time, unseen eyes might be peering through windows, but I had to take the chance; and actually I was beyond caring. I stood over the body. Now I would have to carry it, lift it and run with it down these few steps, run without stopping. My hands went under it; I couldn't raise the body an inch. Drops of perspiration fell on the curtain. *You can't leave it here!* I wriggled one arm under the legs, the other I squeezed under the back. I waited, waited for strength. I closed my eyes and waited. I'd count three. One . . . two . . . th— I brought it up a few feet and tottered forward, weaving my way to the steps, feeling the body slipping free as I took the first one down, somehow holding on, then dropping it and turning away, hearing it tumble, not daring to look . . . and then looking. The body was on the ground, exposed from foot to thigh. I scrambled down. I tossed the covering over it and caught hold of the body by the legs and frenziedly pulled it along the alley, pulled it to the side door of the garage where I let the legs fall while I searched for my keys. A key ring full. Always the wrong one first. The second . . . still wrong. This one . . . and the door unlocked and open. I stepped over the body and pushed it in. I closed the door behind me. My legs crumbled then. I sat on the ground, strength-drained. But there was so much more to do. I got up dizzily and opened the trunk to the car. The body was almost completely unwrapped. I pushed it next to the trunk. I had to stop. The garage was filled with the sound of my breathing; I doubted if I could lift the body any more. But I must! I straddled it and flexed my fingers. Grabbing the covering, I strained up. The body rose. I had the head in, then so very slowly the back. It started to slip out but I held it with my body and stuffed it forward crazily, desperately. Only the legs hung out now. I bent them, squeezing them in. I brought the door down but it would not close all the way.

There was about a two-inch separation. I threw my full weight on it and turned the handle. It missed the first time but caught the second.

Cautiously I stepped outside. Making certain the door was locked, I headed up the alley. I felt as though a thousand eyes were peering at me. Had anyone seen? In the panic of getting the body into the garage I'd lost that fear; it came back sharply. Certainly if someone had seen me there would have been an outcry . . . wouldn't there? . . . Or no? If the police came soon, I would know. What should I do, just wait? I lengthened my steps toward the house, meanwhile searching the ground for bloodstains. There were a few tiny drops near the back door and I paused long enough to scrape my shoes over them. I ran upstairs.

Locking the door, I leaned against it for a few seconds. Then I went to a window and looked out. How long would it take for the police to come? More than five minutes. Five minutes had already passed. I glanced at my watch, the crystal hazed with sweat. It was almost noon. The apartment . . . I had to clean up. I'd forgotten. Where could I begin? The body had been lying on a throw rug and it was red and moist, and when I picked it up I could see that the blood had soaked through to the floor. I put the crutches in the rug and folded it. From the bathroom I got a washrag and a couple of towels. There were flecks of blood on the door and bits of flesh, and on the floor I could see two fragments of teeth. Shutting my eyes, I gathered everything into the washrag and shook the mess into the toilet, flushing it. Another glance at my watch: almost four after. The police would have been here long ago. I shivered in relief. I was able to rub the stains on the door into the dark mahogany finish but the blood on the floor wouldn't come out even though I scrubbed it feverishly with kitchen soap. There was another throw rug in the bedroom and I got that and put it over the stains. If Ginny questioned me . . . what? . . . Let's think. Yes . . . just what I'd told Dr. Michaels. A lamp had fallen. Yes, and I'd cut my hand. I'd say the other rug had got bloody and that I had it in the car to take to a cleaner. But what about the shower curtain? *What about the shower curtain?* I tried to figure something out. I couldn't. But it would come to me when I needed it. It had to.

The cut on my hand had stopped bleeding and I saw it was not a large gash. I'd have to make it bigger to account for all that

blood. I pulled the flesh apart with my nails and started it bubbling once more. I bandaged it with a handkerchief, drawing the ends of the knot tight with my teeth. Feeling faint, I sat with my head between my knees. In a few moments it was over. Now for the lamp. There had to be a broken lamp. A floor reflector lamp stood near where the body had lain and I unscrewed the bulb and took off the reflector and smashed them on the edge of a wastepaper basket so the fragments would fall inside. What else? Anything else? Nothing. But there must be something . . . Oh, God, my pants! They were streaked with blood. I pulled them off and dropped them and the washrag and towels into the rug along with the crutches. Putting on another pair of pants, I took the bundle to the car where I tossed it on the back floor. As I came out of the garage, a woman stepped from the next-door house into her yard to string up a clothes-line. She smiled pleasantly; I hurried past. Inside I got completely undressed but was too weak to shower. I just about reached the bed and threw myself across it. My breath came in hard dry gasps and the thundering of my heart drummed all thought out of my brain. I lay there close to fifteen minutes, almost falling asleep from exhaustion. I pushed myself up, realising there must be so much more to do. Rubber-legged, I walked out to the foyer, still unable to grasp completely all that had happened to me in so short a time. Then on the ceiling I noticed tiny drops of blood, splashed there by the rising and falling crutch. I would never be able to reach them and they would have to remain there as overhanging signposts of my guilt.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THERE were dark lines of dry blood under my fingernails which I'd overlooked before, and I was in the bathroom scraping them clean when Ginny entered the apartment. My body went rigid. I'd been preparing myself emotionally for this moment and yet was entirely unprepared. She called to me from the foyer. My hands clenched the under-edge of the sink: I couldn't let go. She called again. *She would be able to tell! She would read it on my face!*

"Paul?" From the sound, she was standing near . . . *near the place!*

"I'll be right out." My voice was croaky, choked. I sucked my lower lip between my teeth and bit hard. The throw rug, the blood, the broken lamp—everything was jumbled in my brain. Would she notice right away? Apparently not, for she was walking past the bathroom toward the bedroom. I sagged over the sink, held up by shivering arms. My heart was twitching rather than beating. I took a towel from the rack and wiped my hands and then the back of my neck where sweat had drenched the collar. My face in the mirror was lifeless. *She would know!* Nervously I cleaned my nails again, the file going deep, and then rewrapped the handkerchief around my palm. I opened the door, stood for a few seconds poised as though at the brink of an abyss, and stepped out.

She was in front of the dresser, jabbing pins into the back of her hat. She came toward me quickly and kissed my cheek. My arms hung; then they went around her. Tightly. There was a sudden sobbing within me that could not find voice. *Ginny, oh, Ginny, I'm in trouble!* My eyes burned. *Oh, Ginny, Ginny, I'm in trouble!*

"I'm so terribly sorry, Paul," she said.

For *what?* I stepped back, alarmed. What was she sorry about, what did she know? Was it on my face, was it in my eyes?

"I was so shocked to read it," she said. "I hated to call you but you had to find out somehow. . . . Wasn't he ill? Are you sure?"

Davenport. Dead. Only dully remembered. I couldn't control my voice. "He said . . . he never said anything to me if he was."

"It's a shame. You're still shaken by it, aren't you? I can tell," she nodded. "I've never seen you look so pale. He liked you a lot, didn't he, Paul? Well . . . it's a tragedy, but you must realize he took his own life. It isn't as if he'd met with an accident or—Paul, what happened to your hand?"

"Oh, I fell . . . The reflector lamp, I mean. It fell and I cut myself on the glass."

She winced. "Bad?"

"It's not good."

"Let me look at it. If I know you, you didn't put anything on it. You're so careless——"

I wanted her to see. I removed the handkerchief. She looked and turned away almost immediately. "Maybe you ought to go downstairs and let Dr. Michaels put something on it."

"It's all right now. You . . . you should have seen it before."

"Let me bandage it right then. You can't go around with that handkerchief."

She went into the bathroom with me. I put fresh antiseptic on the cut and she wrapped it with gauze and adhesive tape. While she was pressing down the tape, I kept my eyes on her hair and said, "I got blood all over the place. I hope . . . I hope you won't be angry but I just about ruined the rug near the door. . . . It's in the car now. I—I'm going to see if I can get it cleaned."

"You're just lucky you didn't cut an artery. A little lower and——" She shuddered.

I felt a surge of confidence as she returned to the bedroom. When I followed, she was putting her hat in a box.

"Paul," she said, tying the string, "what are you going to do now?"

"About what?"

"Oh . . . with Davenport gone. I mean your writing."

"Don't worry, we'll get along." My own words surprised me. Wasn't that what Ginny always said? I recalled how it used to annoy me lately. But now, in trouble, anything beyond "getting along" had become unimportant.

She opened her closet and concealed by the door removed her dress and slip. "Tomorrow's my last day at work, Paul . . . I don't have to give up my job, you know."

"Forget it." I was unable to worry about such things. Just let me be safe, just give me peace of mind, and we'd get along.

"I mean it, Paul."

When I didn't reply, she drew on a robe and walked into the bathroom. Soon she exclaimed, "Paul, where's the shower curtain?"

There was a tightening inside me again. *What about the shower curtain?*

"Paul?"

Face twisted anxiously, I called back that I'd taken a shower and had almost fallen that I'd clutched the curtain and ripped it. It . . . I'd . . . I'd thrown it out.

"You didn't!"

"It was almost torn in half. It . . . really . . . wasn't any good."

"You should have at least let me look at it."

"I told you it was no good, didn't I?"

"Oh——" Then with a sigh, "You had quite a day, didn't you?"

"Yes," I said. Reaching back, I sat tremulously on the bed.

Water rushed into the sink. Ginny came out, rubbing her face with a towel. She dried her hands. Guess who she saw today. Gertrude Fleming; did I remember Gertrude? I shook my head, thinking of other things, and she said Gertrude was that girl from school who'd been so interested in my writing that time at Harriet Volt's party. Remember that time at the party before we were married? I didn't but said I did because it seemed easier; and she told me how after all these months she'd met Gertrude on the street and she was married to Stan Loomis of the "Stan, Stan, The Giveaway Man" used-car lots. Gertrude was so happy! She wasn't a beautiful girl but full of charm and personality; a *nice* person. And she'd insisted we have dinner with them next week. Would I want to go? My thoughts had drifted and Ginny asked again if I wanted to go and I said where and she said to the Loomis's, naturally. I shrugged that it didn't matter.

"Speaking of dinner," she said, "I don't have anything too exciting. Do you want to eat out? . . . Paul, you're not even listening."

"Anything . . . anything you want to do, Ginny." Why was she bothering me with nonsense?

"You can't think about it all the time, Paul," she said. "It won't help and you're not doing yourself any good."

There was a quick sharp pressure in my chest. What did she mean? My emotions were a weathercock, sensitive to every word. *What did she mean?* . . . And the way she was looking, she might have been seeing unwashed blood in the texture of my flesh or the image of John Rockey which my eyes could still be carrying in their depths. But then, "Let's eat out, Paul. You'll feel better," and her voice, her faint smile, loosed the breath from me. Davenport again. Of course, that's who she meant.

"Whatever you say, Ginny."

"Where shall we go?"

"It doesn't make any difference."

"You're a big help. Paul, what was the name of that place where we got those delicious Napoleons?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you do. They have that waiter with the high voice, the one who told us he was going to quit if he had to serve any more crêpes suzette. What was the word he used—'officiate'? Remember how we laughed outside?"

"You mean Brenner's," I said, tiredly.

"That's right. Let's go there."

"Whatever you——" Brenner's was far. We'd have to drive. The body in the trunk. How even for a second had I forgotten the body in the trunk? "No, I don't want to go there. Let's go somewhere else."

"Where?"

"Some place close. I don't feel like driving."

"I'll drive, Paul."

My head was heavy; it lolled. "Ginny, I just feel like walking, do you mind?"

"But we'll take a nice ride and——"

"My God, don't I have anything to say around here?"

"All right," she said quietly, "we'll go somewhere in the neighbourhood."

We went to a restaurant a few blocks away. I ordered a platter but just played with the food and then set down my knife and fork. Ginny darted glances at me but didn't say anything. Certain that Davenport's suicide was behind my mood, she was trying to be understanding. There was a steady drone of voices all around; laughter pierced it. People were happy.

How could people be happy? The waitress was asking if she should take away my plate. I nodded. Coffee? Yes, coffee; two coffees. Laughter, and a man at the next table patting his lips with a napkin and then lighting a cigar. A good meal and he was pleased with himself. At another table, someone was jotting notes on a napkin. A waitress pocketed coins and a waiter with muscular arms swept by, balancing a tray on one hand. I was a stranger among all this; I didn't belong. There was a body in the trunk of my car, a human body, bloody and disfigured, and . . . oh, help me, what was I to do with it? *Do?* What *could* I do? Nothing! Never in my life would I be able to come close to it again. I wouldn't even have courage enough to open the trunk. It would have to remain there, putrefying and the stench drifting out; and soon I'd have to leave, I'd have to run away. But where, where was I to run? . . . And the voices and the laughter and Ginny saying, "Paul, what are you thinking?"

I glanced up, startled. I shook my head.

"Well, you were thinking of something. Your eyes grew so wide. I was watching."

"If I was it wasn't important."

"I've been thinking something." She took a cigarette from her purse and lighted it, inhaling deeply. She removed a strand of tobacco from her lip. "I've been thinking you need a vacation. It's just about the end of the summer and you haven't taken a day off. You don't realise how tired you look. I'm not trying to scare you, but it's true. . . . Paul, how much longer do you think the book will take?"

Ginny, if you only knew what you were saying!

"Just approximately. Three months? Six?"

"I can't tell, Ginny."

"Can't you take any time off?"

"We'll see."

"I know you and I realise I'm only wasting my breath. When you've got something on your mind, you won't rest until it's finished. But I will tell you this. As soon as you're finished, we're going away. That's definite. Literary luncheons, teas and old ladies wanting your autograph aren't going to hold us back. Settled?" She smiled. "Settled . . . Paul, do you know what I often think about? Provincetown. I haven't forgotten Provincetown," she said.

I was holding a fork, trying to bend it.

"Have you forgotten?" she asked a little sadly. "How would it be there this time of the year? Most people would be leaving soon, I guess, wouldn't they? . . . Paul?"

"Yes, Ginny."

"You're a million miles away, aren't you?"

"I'm listening, darling."

She frowned and after a few seconds said in a different voice, "I love you to call me that." Then she smiled somewhat nervously, like she'd said something she shouldn't. "Paul, know what we have to get this winter? Let's get a book of opera tickets. That way we'll know which nights we're going and we won't have other plans. They don't have to be good seats and it'll be cheaper in the long run. Don't you think it would be better? . . . Oh, that's right, I almost bought you *Faust* today. It was priced so low but then I noticed it was some obscure opera company. Of course, it might have been just as good, but I thought . . ."

Plans and reminiscences, and I ached with unhappiness, for everything she was saying belonged to the other world, the world I wasn't a part of any more. I could look back but not ahead. ("What shall we do tonight, Paul? Let's do something.") I could regret but I could not hope. Her hand was on the table and I reached over blindly and covered it with my own and squeezed hard; I was lonely and scared. She looked surprised and her eyes said, "You haven't held my hand for so long," and she returned the pressure. I wished I could say, "Tell me what to do, Ginny," and yet in this I had to be alone. She talked on, and the yearning for life was growing within me until it almost stifled me; and then it made me strong. My mind turned with a will and a purpose to what it had shied from before: *I must do something with the body!*

"I know what let's do," she said. "Let's go to a movie. It seems like years since we've gone to a movie. In fact I think there's something good playing right here in the neighbourhood."

A movie: to sit, to relax, to have something to eat afterwards and go home—this symbolised to me all the happiness a person could want out of life; to be free enough of mind to go to a movie. But . . . *it's got to be tonight, I have to remove it tonight, do something with it this night or never at all!*

"Do you feel like going?" she asked.

"I can't." *I must get rid of a body, Ginny.*

"Why?"

"I've got . . . got to do something . . . I've got to see a detective."

"Oh, damn!" Then her face grew puzzled. "But I thought with Davenport——"

"This wasn't supposed to be for him," I spoke up.

"What time do you have to leave, Paul?"

"About eight . . . I guess."

"That means you won't be home until at least by ten."

". . . At least."

"I'm mad." But her eyes weren't.

"Why don't you go alone?" I didn't want her home when I left.

"A movie isn't that important. I'll stay home and read."

"But I might not be back until much later. I don't want you to be by yourself."

"I've been alone before."

"Still . . . Let me walk you to the theatre."

"I'm really not in the mood any more. Anyway, the only reason I wanted to go with you was to hold hands."

I got up. "Come on, I'll walk you. I—I'll feel better if you're not alone."

Outside she put her arm through mine. It was a cool evening and the sky was slung low with clouds. Night would move in swiftly. I prayed against rain. *If only I were going with her to a movie. Will I ever go to a movie again?* The too-short walk and the marquee with the darkened letter that spelled MIN instead of MEN. I envied the people in line and the girl in the box office working the change machine: I envied her her boredom. I envied the man coming out with the step-ladder and setting it up under the marquee, and the manager who watched. All these I envied, and the people inside.

"Try to come home early," Ginny was saying.

"I can't . . . can't promise."

"Then just take care of yourself."

"Yes."

She gave me a quick kiss. I wanted to hold on. I hurried away. In the apartment I turned on the living-room lights. It was twenty to eight. I would leave by a quarter after; it had to be black out. I scanned the sky from the window: it might not rain; don't let it rain. I had to decide how I would do it and where, yet I couldn't. The farthest my thoughts would go was to the driving of the car out of the garage. I kept glancing at

my watch. The minutes slid by. By eight o'clock I was pacing and telling myself I couldn't go through with it. How could anyone? It was more than a person—Ginny's picture on my desk. Her eyes seemed to be following me. I stopped, looked away. Did I want her to *know*? I cracked a thumb-knuckle. My lips were dry but the rest of my face was wet. The longer I waited, the worse . . . I strode to the door.

I walked down the alley. There was a breeze in the darkness as before a storm. I hesitated in front of the garage door, the one on the side. The key slid into the lock. I left it there to look into the driveway. No one was out. I came back. The click of the lock and I pushed open the door. Before stepping inside, I reached in my hand and turned on the light. I closed the door. I took a quick look around the trunk, wondering if blood had seeped through. Nothing. It was hard to believe something was inside. *Maybe it's gone, maybe it was never there A dream!* . . . I peered into the back, half convinced by hope. The folded rug on the floor gave me a queer jolt. Before lifting up the overhanging door, I flicked off the light: once I got the car out, I didn't want to have to come back. The door groaned up. I got in the car, flipped the ignition and stepped on the automatic starter. There was a rasp and then a sputter and I kept working the pedal, knowing I shouldn't. The motor whined but wouldn't catch. I turned off the ignition, then tried again. The same. I'd flooded it! I slid a fingernail between my teeth, desperate. I would have to wait. I sat there, breathing into the darkness, hands tight on the wheel. Close to five minutes I waited. I told myself to hold back longer, not to take any chances. A few more seconds and then anxiety won. There was a flicker of life in the motor, it faded, it almost died, then it coughed as though to clear its throat—and roared. I pressed the pedal all the way to the floor. The sound was reassuring. Exhaust fumes thickened the garage. Releasing the brake I pulled out.

At the end of the driveway I wondered whether to turn right or left into the street, and I went left though it made no difference, for I had no plan, nothing. Mr. Drews, who owned the patent-medicine store, was arranging newspapers in the metal rack outside and he saw me and waved. I drove on, down the street with the intersecting trolley tracks, past the hardware, grocery and shoe repair shops, past places and people I knew. My car's reflection drifted across familiar windows. I held the wheel firmly: it became sticky. I worried about police, accidents,

stalling, flat tyres. I looked ahead, to each side, in the rear-view mirror, making certain of red lights and stop signs. Then I recalled something Ferguson had told me once, about how when he'd been on motor-cycles he'd almost always been able to tell when someone behind a wheel had things on his mind: little gestures, nervous movements could give a person away. Teeth clamped, I sidled my elbow on to the open window. *Look natural!* Unconsciously the elbow came down after a while and went tight against my side. My jaws hurt from the pressure and the pain jabbed up to my ear. What to do, where to go?

Fragments of thought flickered through me. A dark alley . . . pull out the body and leave it there . . . or . . . or maybe a street . . . just dump it in the street and the police would think he'd been hit by a car . . . no . . . no, someone might see me . . . anyway the police weren't fools . . . and also, the body mustn't be found . . . as long as it wasn't found I was safe, absolutely safe . . . where then? . . . the river? . . . the river, perhaps . . . that was a possibility, the river . . . find a lonely place where—

Yes, the river. At least I'd try. I headed in its direction. Then it came to me that I'd need something to weigh down the body, otherwise it would float, and I had nothing—nothing! The river was out then. Now what? I turned into another street, thinking, not stopping, afraid to stop, driving on, avoiding main thoroughfares. Where else? Yes, there was a vacant lot near—no, but a housing project was going up across from it and there'd probably be a watchman . . . *Be careful of that car!* . . . So the lot wasn't any good either. I wondered if I shouldn't just smash the car against something or drive it into the river, with the body in the front, and say that Rockey had been alive up to then. But that would take nerve and I'd go all to pieces . . . Where else? . . . Down another street. All streets, all houses were getting to look the same—blurry like on a merry-go-round: they seemed to be moving and I standing still . . . Where else, where else? *Think!* . . . Wasn't there a place—what was the name of that place—? Oh, what was the name of that place! . . . Taberton Hollow! That was it! Why hadn't I thought of it at the beginning? Taberton Hollow, desolate, sprawling—I could . . . *I could bury the body there!*

Taberton Hollow was a heavily wooded area of some four square miles, just within the city limits. It took me about a half-hour to get there. Sloping down from the fringing streets,

it was a valleyed mass of blackness, its trees mushroomed sombrelly against the sky. Slowly I drove around it, seeking courage to enter. Ahead of me was a dirt lane, a lovers' lane probably, and I approached it, not sure I could do it, then certain I could not—and then at the last second turning into it. The car rocked and heaved over the ruts. A milky haze hung before the headlights; the scurried trees were silvery in the glare. Remembering I could be seen from the street, I snapped off the lights and was instantly clamped in blackness. It was as though a tunnel had been plugged. I braked the car quickly and the wheel dug into my ribs. I thought I heard a *sliding* in the trunk. Terror bristled the hairs on my arms. I threw the gear into reverse, held it—*you mustn't go back, go back and you're lost!*—and then returned it to neutral. Hurriedly I closed my window, but instead of holding out the night it captured it within. I felt that things were peering at me, their faces flat against the glass. Gradually the darkness yielded and the lane took form again. I inched the car forward. About two hundred yards in, I stopped. I opened the door but couldn't make myself step out.

The air was cool, sweet-smelling and damp. It held the lonely sounds of whippoorwills and crickets, and in the distance a croaking. There was a sudden buzzing in the car and a flitting around my head; I brushed it away; it returned. The thing was trying to get in my ear and I clamped hands over the sides of my head, and in a different kind of panic slid out of the car. I held on to the door. The buzzing faded. A wind blew along the lane. The trees seemed to be watching me, their leaves clashing.

Do it quickly!

Do *what*? I remembered I had no tools for digging. The best I could do was hide the body among the trees and hope no one found it. I opened the trunk. The body was still wrapped, thank heaven! I grabbed the covering and pulled the body to the ground. Holding it by the ankles I dragged it off the lane. Among the trees I let go. The leaves were angrier there. *Run!* I started to, then caught myself. Did I want it to be found? A sort of calm passed over me, as though I'd gone beyond the scale of fears. Maybe . . . maybe I could find a better place. I went deeper among the trees, hands extended to protect my face from the brush. Stumbling, I fell to one knee: I probed about cautiously. I was in some kind of gully. It was deep, though not deep enough for the body, and long and wide. Soft damp dirt

broke in my fingers. If I could only—Wasn't there anything in the car I could use to dig? I scrambled back. Searching through the trunk I came up with a jack handle: it had a pointy end.

I started off but then returned to the car, having thought of something else I might use. I pried off a hub cap. It would make a pretty good shovel.

Back at the gully again. On my knees, I plunged the jack handle into the dirt. It sank deep and I worked it around, loosening the earth, and then pulled it out and slammed it in again. With the hub cap, I scooped out large hunks of moist dirt. Above me the leaves were in violent uproar, and after about fifteen minutes the first soft drop of rain splattered against my hand. I had to beat the storm! Still on my knees, I surveyed my work. Just a little more! Another drop; still another. Just . . . a . . . little—*there!* I put the jack handle and hub cap on the lip of the grave, flattened my palms on the ground for support and tried to stand. *I couldn't!* My back refused to straighten. I slumped forward on hands and knees. The rain fell teasingly, with long pauses between drops. Digging the toes of my shoes into the dirt, I pushed up with my hands. Pain scared my back but I forced myself up beyond the pain and stood erect. Then I went for the body. Although my back ached like a sick tooth, I dragged the bundle to the edge of the grave. With my feet I rolled it in. I started to throw in dirt but then remembered that I mustn't bury the body with the curtain and blanket, that these could be traced to me. I pulled them off. The blood-caked face stared up. *First the face!* I grabbed a handful of dirt. . . .

The job done, there was a shattering of everything that had given me strength. I gathered up the blanket, shower curtain, hub cap and jack handle. I ran.

The car swayed and jolted as I backed it out.

I swung into the street and the gear went into first with a screech. I pulled ahead. I didn't turn on my lights until rounding the corner. It was beginning to rain harder. I took the rain's holding back until now as a good omen. The windshield wipers worked steadily; their slapping back and forth was a comforting sound, a *safe* sound. I eased up on the accelerator. I was cold, exhausted, filthy and wet, every part of my body seemed to have a pain of its own—and yet a form of exhilaration had come over me. I smoked a cigarette and the smoke dribbled from

lips and nostrils as I headed home. A few blocks farther on however something jiggled in my mind, something old and forgotten, and shook itself free to take terrible shape and meaning. Taberton Hollow—wasn't that the place where Peter Crisponi had buried *his* victim? . . . My God, wasn't Taberton Hollow the place?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ABURST of rain crashed on the windshield, followed so swiftly by others that the wipers couldn't carry the water away fast enough. Peering through the steamy rain-closing arc before me, concentrating with deliberate effort upon my driving, I was glad for the storm's sudden onslaught: it had canted my thoughts from Peter Crisponi, from the remembrance that somehow gave my crime an atrociousness and horror that I still hadn't ascribed to it, that I'd managed even yet to separate from the crimes of other men. Drops of rain swept through the crack of the no-draft. I drove on, anxious for home.

The storm eased shortly to a drizzle, a faint mist that appeared to rise up from the street. I turned on the radio and searched for news, wondering if John Rockey's disappearance would be broadcast and how it would be to hear his name. The memory of Peter Crisponi had brought into perspective the degree to which my crime, which still seemed so personal a thing to me, now belonged to everyone. I turned the dial past music and announcements, past laughter and a child singing, past—and behind me a horn sounded. I glanced in the mirror and saw bright lights flattened against the back window. I kept my eyes on them, fingers stuck to the radio knob. The horn blew again and then the lights swerved sideways and crept to my left. The automobile edged forward until it was even with mine. It did not try to pass; its horn gave staccato warnings. Instead of shutting off the radio, in confusion I only made it louder. Music blared and my fingers went dead and couldn't turn it off. The rain-streaked window blurred the car I was certain held police and I remember thinking, *over, it's all over*, and slumping against the wheel and hearing the horn again and this time realising it wasn't a squad car but that someone was trying to tell me something. The driver, a man, had rolled down his window and was shouting and waving toward the back. I managed to soften the radio.

"Hey, buddy, your trunk—your trunk's open!"

The car moved past. I pulled to the kerb, got out and ran to the back. In my haste to leave the lane, I'd forgotten to close the trunk. Lowering the door, I thought of the crutches and the rest of the things in the car; I let the door swing up and went for them. I bundled everything inside; I slammed on the hub cap. The motor was idling but I made no attempt to drive yet. I was still too unstrung. I patted my pockets for cigarettes but found none. Damn, I needed a cigarette! A drugstore was across the street and I debated whether to go there. I told myself not to—and yet I just had to have a cigarette. I walked over and looked in the window. The druggist was talking to a man at the fountain. I entered. The druggist lifted himself off his elbows.

"Can I have a pack of Luckies?"

The druggist eyed me up and down, a flicker of a frown squeezing his brow. Then he smiled. "You really fell into it, didn't you, son?"

I didn't understand but knew it could only be bad. The other man swivelled around and he too was looking at me oddly. 'This man said, "You out picking blueberries or something?"

I saw my hands—and *remembered*. The backs of them were caked with dirt and there was dirt between my fingers. Brown burrs clung to my jacket sleeves and elbows and to my pants. My knees had dark wet patches, and suddenly I was aware of every pellet of dirt in my hair and every streak on my face. My shoes dripped mud. I was petrified, and both men kept staring.

"Hey," the druggist complained, "you see what you did to my floor?" He clucked his tongue and shook his head. "I ought to give you a mop, that's what I ought to do," he said good-naturedly. "You say Luckies? . . . Son—Luckies?"

"Yes . . . !" I hovered between waiting and flight.

He turned to the shelves behind. "Ought to give you a mop, yes, sir." He had to open a fresh carton. He took his time about tearing off the cover. Still facing the shelves, "Hank, you weren't handing me a story before, were you? That's as far fetched as anything I ever . . . Two, son?"

"Just *one*." In the mirror behind the fountain I could see the other man picking his teeth and watching me.

"Okay," and the druggist came around. He set the pack on the counter. "One she is."

Outside the store, I took long strides to the car.

It was ten to eleven when I got to the apartment and Ginny wasn't home yet. Pulling off my clothes, I tossed them on the floor of my closet. I had to sit; I hadn't the strength to stand. Naked I dropped on to a stool. My head hung and my body was chilled with sweat. I could see the flesh palpitating over my heart. The drugstore incident that had sent me racing home had become unimportant, as had everything else: nothing mattered but my own weariness. I was so spent I didn't care if someone entered to arrest me; just so I wouldn't have to think, just so I could sleep. But soon there was a tingling in my legs as of life flowing back warmly, and with its return came all the anxieties. I lifted myself from the stool, took my pyjamas and went into the bath-room.

The shower poured hot and steamy into the tub. I scrubbed myself and let the calming water run over my hair and down my body. Washing away the dirt of the grave, it drew out my aches and restored to me a measure of confidence. Nothing could happen to me here; I was home. There was security in these walls and the steam rising up from the tub. I raised my face to the water and it flowed over my eyes and I turned my back, working my shoulder-blades.

"Paul, I'm home!"

"Okay!" It had become any other night of the week.

"Paul," she said outside the door, "be careful you don't wet the floor too much. Remember there's no curtain. I don't want Dr. Michaels to have a flood."

"Don't worry."

I shut off the shower and stepped on to the rug with the soft piling. With my palm I wiped the steam off the medicine-cabinet mirror.

"When did you get home?" she called from the bedroom.

"A few minutes ago." My face was deep in a towel.

"Did you get a story?" She sounded like she was drawing her dress over her head.

"Yes."

"I saw a terrible movie." She was next to the door again. "Lois recommended it. I'll know better next time . . . Oh, someone said something very funny. At least I thought so. There was a man sitting next to me and he whispered to me he thought the picture must be an old television film. Then he walked out. Oh, did I laugh! I felt foolish sitting there laughing by myself."

I cleaned my fingernails and inspected my hands. I'd removed the bandage from my palm and now I cleaned the cut again. This time I left it unbandaged. I noticed a thin scratch running across the fingers on my right hand. Probably from a burr. It wasn't much; you had to look close to see. I put it on the nylon pyjamas Ginny had bought me for my birthday. They felt good. I went to the kitchen for a glass of water. Ginny followed, drawing a robe around her.

"How about milk, Paul?"

"All right." I realised then that I was hungry. "Do you have anything to go with it?"

"I'll see but I don't—" She opened the breakfastbox. "Here's that coffee cake I bought yesterday. Coffee cake?"

"That'll do."

"One thing I don't know how to do is bake," she said, "but I'm going to learn. I remember once I tried to make an upside-down cake for Daddy but it got stuck to the pan." She put down the plate and went to the refrigerator for milk. "Oh, Paul," she wailed from the sink, "look what I did!"

Trying to pry off the cap, she'd let it fall into the bottle. I fished it out with a fork and put it sogging on the plastic tablecloth. She poured a glass for each of us and rinsed out the bottle. We sat at opposite ends of the table. My feet were bare on the linoleum. I closed the shades against the night: it brightened the room and made me feel beyond reach. Nothing could harm me here; this was my home, my castle. My eyes wandered. I saw that the pattern on the tablecloth was of many little red flowers and wondered why I hadn't noticed before. Other objects about the room took new form—the refrigerator, the stove, the cabinet whose shelves Ginny had lined with scalloped paper, the small white radio there—things I'd seen before but had not seen.

"Why don't you drink your milk?" Ginny asked. She tilted her head. "I guess you know you're staring, young man."

". . . You just look so pretty."

"Oh, I *can't*! I've got to wash my hair. In fact I should do it now—"

"No, don't," I cut in. "Not now." I didn't want to be alone even for seconds.

"I'm too sleepy anyway. Par-don me," and she yawned, held the back of her hand over her mouth and then brought it down with a big smile. She blinked. "See what I mean?"

"Don't go to bed yet." I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep.

"I'm still a working girl, remember? Just one more day. I imagine I'll be home early though, tomorrow. I'll probably just work half a day . . . Paul, your eyes look so tired! You're the one who should go to bed."

"I'm not sleepy at all."

"By the way, what did you say to Dr. Michaels? I met him before. He said you were a regular grouch this afternoon."

I lowered the glass from my lips. "What else did he tell you?"

"That was about it. What happened?"

The night was creeping in. . . .

"Oh, when the lamp fell he came rushing upstairs. I'd cut myself and he was knocking at the door and I was all upset and I guess I was abrupt with him."

"Explain it to him, won't you? He seemed very hurt." She tried vainly to repress a yawn. "Paul, I'm dead! I don't know why, I didn't do that much today. But I'm going to have to go to sleep. If you want to stay up——" She started to rise.

"Wait . . . wait for me!" I'd gone into Taberton Hollow, I'd buried a body . . . and yet I couldn't be by myself now. She held her checks, elbows on the table, eyes partly closed, until I finished the cake and milk. As I rose, there was a spasm of pain in the small of my back. I groaned and fell half-bent against the table. Ginny jumped up and grabbed my arm.

"Paul—Paul, what is it?"

"Nothing——" It was going away. "I'm all right." Erect, I walked around, testing it. "I guess I strained my back."

"How?"

"I don't know, it just happened. Probably I twisted it getting up."

She sighed. "A cut hand, a bad back, a broken lamp, a torn shower curtain—you certainly are going to sleep. It's not safe for you to stay up."

Before going to bed, I made sure the front door was locked. Turning out lights in the other rooms, I walked swiftly from the darkness. The night-table lamp was burning on Ginny's side of the bed; Ginny was in the bath-room. I opened the window. Rain was falling steadily but it wasn't coming in. In bed I lay on my back and wished the night were over.

Ginny crept in next to me. She switched off the light. A lid dropped over me; I flinched against it and grew choked.

"Good night, Paul, sleep well." She kissed me and went on her side, facing me.

The blackness of Taberton Hollow, with its croakings and chirps and its leaves making high loud swishings, and its hidden eyes. . . .

"Ginny!"

"Yes, Paul?"

"Do you think . . . we ought to keep a light on in the living-room?"

"Why, darling?"

"You—you know. You hear about things happening at night. I just read about a fire . . . Maybe it's better."

"If you want. Should I do it? Your back——"

"Please, honey."

She slid off. A glow was reflected against the door.

"I didn't realise you were such a worrier," she said, coming back.

Her knees touched the side of my leg. I took her hand. "Do you mind if I hold it?"

"Of course I don't," she said sleepily.

And John Rockey with the hole in his forehead, and the pieces of teeth on the floor. . . .

". . . Ginny."

"Yes, Paul."

I was trying to think what to say. "Tomorrow, you call me when you're finished. I—I'll pick you up."

"All right." She was breathing softly; I could feel it against my shoulder.

And dropping it outside, on the stairs, and dragging it . . .

"Ginny, are you asleep?"

"I . . . hear you."

"Do you love me?"

"Very . . . much."

"Will you always love me?"

She squeezed my hand weakly but didn't open her eyes.

"Let's talk, darling," I pleaded.

"I'm . . . so . . . sleepy."

"All right, you sleep . . . Ginny?"

"Uh——"

"Tomorrow, maybe we'll take a ride somewhere. You'll bring your paint——" Her lips made bubbly sounds. I'd been on one elbow and I lay back. There was sweat in the folds of my neck.

"Everything's going to be all right," I said to the ceiling, to the blackness, to myself; but Ginny heard and she murmured, "Of course," and then her hand slipped from mine as she changed position. She slept, her back to me.

Everything *would* be all right! It *would*, I just knew! First of all, Rocky was buried and no one would find him. And even if they did, I could explain, I could say—

I thought of Peter Crisponi. But it wasn't, it wasn't the same! On the surface, yes, but underneath it was so different. We weren't alike as men. I'd believed in decent things all my life while he'd been no good, he'd been a drunk, he'd been shifless—he'd been *capable* of murder! He used to beat Claire and he—*but hadn't I struck her?* I sat up. I wondered: what kind of person had he been before he met up with Claire?

A truck rumbled by and there were voices on the street, lonely sounds like those heard from a train at night in a strange railroad station. . . .

I had *murdered* a man! No matter how I cloaked it in my mind, no matter what words I used to soften it, I had committed murder. I had beaten a man to death ("beyond recognition", my stories used to read) and had buried him at night. I had done what I'd never believed one "normal" human being could do to another; I'd thought—only "animals". And like an animal—the murderer of a *cripple*—I would be hunted down.

But the body was buried!

Yet so had James Peterson's and they had found it. They would find John Rocky's too. Who knew if my car hadn't been seen leaving the lane? And the men in the drugstore—they had seen me! That had been a terrible mistake. But everything I would do from now on could be a mistake. The simplest action might be wrong. And Dr. Michaels hearing the thud, and my cut hand, and the blood under the rug, and the stuff in the car and the . . . the *cab*, Rocky had come here by cab, *they could easily trace it!* I had to run, I had to leave!

"Ginny!" I shook her. "Ginny, Ginny!"

She turned without waking. I took my hand from her. No, I had to stay. Flight would be a sure sign of guilt. I had to remain here, I had to wait, I had to be strong.

I fell back. Never in my life had I done anything that couldn't be undone: everything had had a door or a way back or around. I recalled something Peter Crisponi had written Claire from the death house, about there being "no way out" for him.

No way out! The words themselves were savage and relentless. No way out. Run here, run there, dig, fly; and no way out! My hands covered my lips. *Dear God, please, God, You know who I am, You know my soul, You know my heart, help me, please help me!*

I prayed and there was relief in prayer, but after it was over, no final comfort. I got out of bed and turned on the kitchen light. I put off the radio, keeping it low. I smoked cigarettes, thought and waited for news.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE sun was on my face when I woke. Blinking against it, I sat up and looked next to me for Ginny. She wasn't there. Then I saw it was almost noon. I pivoted off the bed and stood up. Except for a tightness the pain was gone from my back. I hadn't come to bed until after four, although I'd dozed off once on the kitchen chair. There hadn't been anything on the radio about the disappearance and I'd spent most of the time thinking up possible stories for the police, none of which I could remember in any detail now. But it didn't seem to matter. The sunlight in the room seemed to make things right again. On the street everything was warm and dry; two little girls were sitting on our steps, playing jacks.

My mouth had a flat gritty taste from too many cigarettes and I rinsed it out and felt better. In the kitchen I lighted the burner under the coffee and took from the refrigerator the glass of orange juice Ginny always left there when I got up late: it was thick on top and I stirred it. The sight of the radio gave me a thrust toward reality. I turned it on.

"... for Jackie, for R.P., for Dolly at Williams' Luncheonette, for Mrs. Helen Dalanzo who's celebrating her birthday—congratulations, Mrs. Dalanzo, and many happy returns of the day—for Bruce who wants us to dedicate this to Lynne, we're going to play... oh, wait, here's another card. For——"

I twisted the dial.

"... and free, absolutely free with each purchase of a bedroom suite, a hassock..."

"... which means that the prize has now reached seven hundred and fifty dollars. I see we just about have time for another call. Our operators——"

Music and then, "... on the Kaesong sector of the eastern front. This was the eighth Chinese attempt to wrest the hill from strong U.N. forces. The enemy is reported to have lost more than twelve hundred men in the last assault. On the western end of the front, U.N. activity has been limited to light probing skirmishes north-west of Yonchon, but so far no battle of any

large scale is shaping up. Meanwhile, here in the city, a three-alarm fire has destroyed a warehouse near——”

The phone rang. I stayed by the radio. The announcer was going into a lengthy description of the blaze. The phone kept ringing. An account of a hit-run death followed. The ringing wouldn't stop. I tuned in the radio louder and went to answer it. It was Ginny. I was trying to listen to her and the news at the same time. She said she would be (“... police are searching for a car with a missing headlight——”) finished work by half-past one. She thought she remembered my saying something about picking her up. Did I (a crackle of static disrupted the broadcast and I strained to hear through it) still want to? The static persisted.

“Paul, what's the radio on so loud for? I can hear it from here.”

“Hold on a second.”

I hurried to it but by the time I got the station clear, the announcer was about to read an “unsolicited letter from a satisfied——” I shut it off. Probably, I tried to convince myself, if the disappearance had been broadcast, it would have been one of the earlier announcements. I returned to the phone. As I lifted the receiver, I remembered the throw rug in the foyer. Although I wanted to forget everything, to let things slip by, the blood under the rug worried me. Should the police ever come here, the story of my cut hand might not work with them, for they could test my blood against the stains. I had to make another attempt to clean the floor; and I had to do it now, while Ginny was away.

I told Ginny I wouldn't be able to meet her and she said that would be all right, she'd probably be home by two then. That gave me a little more than an hour and a half. I pulled aside the rug. There was one large stain, almost the size of my hand, and two smaller ones near it, all of them as irregular as ink blots. Yesterday's scrubbing had turned the blood a light pink; but when I tried to scrape it off with a knife, I realised that the blood had soaked into the wood so as to be a part of it. But sandpaper should be able to remove it. Probably it would leave marks on the floor, but getting the blood off was the vital thing.

Dressed and about to leave for the hardware store, I thought of the suit I'd tossed in the closet. I took it out. In the bath-room I removed the burrs and brushed the crusted dirt into the toilet. The hard stains remained on the knees, however, and there was

one on the elbow I hadn't seen before. Although I hated to lose the suit, I decided to put it with the rest of the things in the car. Jamming it under my arm, I went to the garage and flung it in the trunk: everything in there would have to be disposed of too. But these could wait. The bloodstains upstairs had no door and lock over them.

At the hardware store, I bought several grades of sandpaper since I wasn't sure which would be best for the job. Although I was in a hurry, I stopped in the patent-medicine store for a newspaper.

"Anything published this month, Paul?" Mr. Drews asked from behind the counter. Mr. Drews liked me. I was the bright young man he bragged about to his customers and showed them my stories in the magazines, although he could never understand why I didn't use my own name.

"There's probably something out." I motioned toward the racks.

"Can't keep track of 'em yourself, eh?"

I glanced through the paper as I headed home. There wasn't anything about Rocky in the front news section. As I entered the house, Dr. Michaels was leaving his apartment. He nodded at me stiffly and bent over to lock his door.

"I'm sorry about what happened yesterday, Doctor," I said. "I wanted to tell you before but I didn't have a chance."

"That's all right."

"I just want you to know I didn't mean to snap at you. The lamp fell and I cut my hand and it was bleeding pretty bad. I guess I sort of took it out on you."

His expression changed. "Oh, I didn't realise you'd cut yourself. How's it now?"

"It's fine."

"Let me see."

"It isn't nec——"

"Let me see," he said professionally. I had to transfer the newspaper from under one arm to my other hand. He held my palm and pressed his thumb against the flesh. "That's not too bad. But let's go inside, I want to clean it out for you. I don't see any but there might be some glass in it."

"You don't have to bother," I hastened to say.

"It may start to fester on you."

"I'll be down later, how's that? I've got something to do right now."

"Whatever you say but I'm going to the hospital now and I won't be back until at least five."

"Maybe I'll see you then."

Upstairs I sanded the floor until the paper got hot and wore through, but the blood came off except for a few black lines between the floorboards. The wood was scarred in places but it was as good a job as I could do. The blood drops on the ceiling glared at me: I'd have to forget about them, though. Getting up, my back caught me once more. I held it until the pain faded.

I looked at my watch. Ginny wouldn't be home for another hour. Could I do anything with the things in the trunk? After that I'd have done everything I possibly could do. I knew that I'd seen Dr. Michaels burn rubbish once in some kind of a can but I couldn't recall seeing it after that. Maybe it was in the basement. I went downstairs and found it under a bent pile of rugs. It was a rusty container with perforated sides and lid, large enough to hold everything in the trunk: I could start a good fire with paper and lighter fluid. Carrying the container outside, I rolled it toward the garage.

"You're not going to burn anything in this weather, are you?"

A woman was in her yard across the driveway. She was sitting on a folding chair, fanning herself. A dog played at her feet.

"No, I just brought it out," I said.

"I was *wondering*. Isn't it just terrible for almost the last day of August?"

"Yes," I said.

I walked inside. Upstairs, I sat at the back window. The woman would only stop fanning herself to rub the dog's head and he would go against the ground and writhe around and then run away barking and come back. After some fifteen minutes the woman went in her house. I sprang up. She came out within seconds, chewing on a piece of fruit.

I was sitting idly at my desk when Ginny came home. She kissed me, remarked about being "unemployed now" and drew a small package from her handbag. She showed me two embroidered handkerchiefs.

"Miss Fulton gave them to me. I was so surprised you can't imagine. You remember my telling you about her, don't you? She's the one when I first started working told Gloria Anders I was the typical rich girl who acts like she's out to uplift the

masses and yet never wears the same dress twice. I was so mad then, you remember, and yet I was just as angry at Gloria for telling because she just loved to repeat that. And yet a few minutes before I left, Miss Fulton came over to me and said she wanted me to have ~~thys~~e. Wasn't that wonderful of her? It just shows you you never know people and now I'm not sure if I always acted nice to her. It's been worrying me . . . Paul, isn't it *hot*?" and she sat down, hands on her lap, and breathed out. "Did you do much today?"

"A little."

"Well, I've been thinking. All the way home on the bus. I know the one thing I mustn't do is tempt you from your work but today seems like something special. Anyway, I don't see how you can work here, it's too hot. Even Mr. Haines had his jacket off when I came in to say good-bye—and incidentally to get my cheque. So what I have in mind," she smiled, "is all for you. You can take your typewriter or pencil and paper and—Let's go somewhere in the country," she said abruptly. "Let's have a little picnic. We'll—And what's that look for, I ask? I don't think it's such a terrible idea at all. In fact I have it all planned. We'll go somewhere around Matoisset. Remember how we wanted to see the other side of the lake? Let's go. I'll make sandwiches, we'll take our bathing suits. We only went swimming that once and here it's almost fall. I want you to get some fun. You've got a long hard winter ahead of you and——"

"The months ahead, what would they hold for me?"

"—you'll have plenty of time to sit in a stuffy room and bang that typewriter. In fact out there in the country you'll be able to think better." She stood up. "Anyway it won't do you any good to argue because I've already decided. We've got ham, we've got cheese, we've got lettuce, do we have tomatoes?—yes, we have tomatoes, we've got bread. Oh, and there's liverwurst, that's right. But you don't like liverwurst, do you?"

"Not especially"—getting out of the apartment had become appealing—"but you can make a couple for yourself."

"I'll make about six altogether . . . Paul, that time we were supposed to go on a picnic and it rained, did we ever return the thermos bottle to the Millers?"

"I didn't."

"I didn't either. I forgot. Then it must still be in the bottom of the kitchen cabinet. They must think . . . but they probably

didn't need it anyway or they'd have asked. Paul, what are you sitting for? We've got a lot to do. Oh, remember to take a blanket," she said as she strode toward the kitchen. I followed.

After she made the sandwiches, I wrapped them in wax paper. We didn't know whether to fill the thermos bottle with milk or water but decided on milk because we'd probably be able to get water somewhere. We packed the bathing suits and got the blanket and then went back to the kitchen for the basket of food.

"Do we have everything?" she questioned. "If this is like every other picnic I've been on we'll forget something. The food"—she quickly counted the sandwiches—"thermos bottle, swimming stuff in the living-room, the blanket . . . What else? . . . Do you need sun glasses?"

"I don't—"

Footsteps coming up the stairs. Heavy footsteps.

"—need any," I finished almost inaudibly. I looked toward the living-room.

The floorboards creaked out in the hall. Silence, and then a sharp rapping on the door.

"Paul," Ginny said from the sink, "will you see who it is? I want to fix this wax paper . . . Paul? *Paul*, someone's at the door!"

". . . You go."

"Why, you're standing there doing noth—*Oh!*" She brushed past me, calling, "One second!" I was like stone. The front door opened. I heard a man's voice and then the door closing as he stepped inside. Ginny and the man were talking now. I went flat against the wall, trying to hear. They were speaking in low tones. The police . . . it had to be the police . . . and yet maybe—

"Paul, will you come here a minute?"

I drew away from the wall. There was a sensation in my stomach that was almost sexual.

"Paul?"

Where were all the stories I'd thought of last night? I couldn't remember one! What could I say . . . do? Mentally I was running all over the room, seeking a way of escape; actually I was too frozen to take another step. And Ginny was coming back to the kitchen; I could hear her.

"Paul"—she was peeved—"someone wants to talk to you."

"I—I was doing something."

"Well, *talk* to him, won't you, we have to go away."

She remained in the doorway. I went to the sink, buying time, and let the water run and filled up a glass but couldn't swallow and had to hold it in my mouth a while before forcing it down. A fragment of a story came back; I grasped for it, tried to build upon it.

"He's *waiting*, Paul, he's a *detective*."

"What . . . does . . . what does he want?"

"He's trying to locate someone he thinks came to this house yesterday morning. I told him I wasn't home and he asked if anyone else had been and I said you were. So you just go out there and tell him you didn't see anyone. . . Are you coming? We have to *leave*."

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I'm coming."

She walked out ahead of me. I stayed behind a few more moments. The temptation was to say I hadn't seen or even known Rockey, but I'd become rational enough to realise I mustn't do that for it could be too easily proved a lie. I had to admit certain things and . . . yes, that's what I'd say . . . I had to give a reason why he'd come and I'd say Rockey had wanted to borrow money. He'd come to borrow money and then he'd left and that's all I knew. He'd been here and gone and . . . let them . . . let them prove the rest.

I walked out. The man was waiting in the . . . foyer. I remembered the cut on my palm and hurriedly thrust my hand into my pocket; I thought of the bloodstains on the ceiling and the scarred floor under the rug. . . .

Like out of a fog I saw a figure in a Panama hat and short sleeves, with a suit jacket flung over one arm. I saw a long narrow face that I'd seen before but which I couldn't attach a name to. In one of the many station houses I'd been in, I'd seen this face, this man: perhaps I'd talked to him or joked or merely nodded a hello; but wherever I'd seen him, he looked different here in my own home. Not physically different, but different just the same.

"Sorry to bother you, chief," he said in a high-pitched whining voice, "but maybe you can help me out. I'm running down a missing persons on a fellow——" He cocked his head. "Say, haven't I seen you somewhere before, chief?"

"I think . . . we've . . . I think we've met."

"Yeah, I'm sure, I'm positive, but I don't know where. The name's Shanahan. Third District."

"I'm . . . Paul Weiler."

"Weiler. Weiler." He turned his eyes toward the ceiling. *The blood drops . . .*

"I write . . . I write fact-detective stories."

"Yeah?" He looked down, clamped a hand on the back of his head. "Wait a second . . . Oh, *sure!* Weren't you the fellow who was down to see Lieutenant Morrissey on—what was it now?—it was a narcotics job, wasn't it? Yeah, sure, that was it. He gave you the story and I hunted up those pictures. Oh, *sure!* How you doin'?" He stuck out his hand. The fingers within my pocket curled. I drew out my hand. He clenched it and let go. It went back in my pocket. "If this isn't a hot one," he grinned. "Instead of us solving one for you maybe you can solve one for us. You can never figure it, can you?"

"What is it . . . you want?"

They were looking, he said, for some fellow named John Rockey. He was a real fat guy—"this wide," he understood—who was a cripple and got around on crutches. The last anyone saw of him was yesterday morning, around a quarter to eleven, when he'd left his house by cab. They'd checked with the cab company this morning and learned that he'd come to this address.

"I knocked downstairs," Shanahan said, "but there's no one in so I came up here. Your missus says you were home yesterday. You happen to see this fellow?"

I never saw him, I never knew him. . . .

"Yes," I said, trying to control my voice. "Yes, he was here." I felt Ginny's eyes on me. I didn't look at her. I thought if I looked at her I'd never be able to lie.

"Yeah? Good!" He put down his jacket and took out a small spiral note-book and a mechanical pencil. "What time did he get here?"

"About . . . sometime around eleven."

"Stay long?"

"I'd say . . . about fifteen minutes . . . Yes, about fifteen minutes."

"Uh-huh." He made notes. "Hope you don't mind all the questions, chief, but you know how these things are. The guy'll probably be home by the time I get back to the district but"—he shrugged—"this is what the city pays me for. . . . What did he want?"

"He——" For a time I couldn't get the words out. "He came for money. He wanted to borrow money from me."

Shanahan puckered his lips. "How much?"

I was thinking clearly now. A strength had come over me. It was the same kind of strength that had enabled me to drag John Rockey's body out of the house, to go into the dark woods and bury it.

"He wanted fifty dollars."

"You give it to him?"

I attempted a smile and felt the corners of my lips twitch. "No, I'm afraid I didn't."

"Say what he wanted it for?"

"No."

"Did he sound worried? Or maybe act worried?"

"He"—a new thought—"yes, he did in a way. He——" I almost said he'd paced the floor but realised that was impossible, and I finished with, "he just seemed on edge."

"You know him well?"

"Just . . . just casually. I met him while I was on a story."

Shanahan didn't ask me to elaborate. "You have any idea where he went to after he left?"

"No, I don't."

"Guess he took another cab from here, didn't he?"

I was about to say he had when it came to me they would be able to check that. "No, he called someone to pick him up in a car. He asked if he could use the phone and——"

"You hear him mention a name?"

"No, I didn't. All . . . all I remember is overhearing him ask this person to pick him up in front of the house in about fifteen minutes."

He was scribbling. "Did he?"

"I imagine so but I didn't really see. Rockey went right down. Then I . . . well, then I sort of forgot about him."

"How the devil did he get up all those stairs?" This was a question to himself rather than to me. "I just about made 'em myself and all I got is corns." He closed the note-book on his thumb. "Anything else you can tell me?"

"That's . . . that's about it. You say he's . . . disappeared?"

"Yeah." He said it in a tired voice. He said it like it was just an incident and not very important, like he had too many other things on his mind. "Chances are he'll show up. Most of 'em do. Quarrel at home, maybe someone hounding him for

money, maybe he got some crazy bug in his head . . . things like that. Happens every day in the week. The thing is this fellow can't stay gone too long—not with that description." He picked up his coat and draped it over his arm. The note-book disappeared in his shirt pocket. "Of course, there's always the chance something did happen to him. A guy like that, he"—a look at Ginny—"well, he probably can't lead a . . . a normal sex life and he meets up with all kinds of characters and . . . well, you never know. But like I said, he'll probably show up by himself one of these days and give someone hallelujah for yelling copper. Meanwhile I've got to pound the sidewalks." He waved. "You're lucky you just write these stories, chief. . . . Look, if you happen to hear from him again, get in touch, won't you?"

"I will."

"Take it easy." He started to hold out his hand but withdrew it when I pretended not to notice and opened the door. He nodded good-bye to Ginny.

Closing the door, I listened for his footsteps going down. Instead, with a start, I heard him coming back. He knocked. I opened it part way.

"Say, I happened to remember. You still interested in some good cases? I just made a terrific pinch. Maybe you saw it in the papers. This woman was walking along the street, see, and she's carrying a purse and——"

He went through the whole thing and I told him the case sounded good and that I'd see him on it one of these days. This time I waited until he walked down the stairs before closing the door. My legs went dead then. I would have dropped on a chair if Ginny hadn't been watching. I groped for a cigarette in the ceramic tray on the lamp-table and felt her stare and anticipated her questions. They came almost immediately.

"Why didn't you tell me about yesterday, Paul?"

"There wasn't . . . I didn't think there was anything to tell."

"Who is he? . . . What's his name—Rocco? Rockey?"

"Just . . . just some fellow. Do you want . . . should we go?"

She nodded. "You take this bag and the blanket. I'll get the food." She went into the kitchen and came back with the basket. In the garage, Ginny wanted to put everything in the trunk but I said there was no need for it, that we had plenty of room in the back. She didn't argue.

The gas tank was almost empty and I stopped at my regular service station.

"She's pretty cruddy under the fenders, Mr. Weiler," the attendant said later, checking the tyres. "Looks like you hit a lot of dirt."

This too? I doubted if I could go on; nor did it seem worth the effort any more.

A bell rang somewhere as I drove over a rubber tube, getting out of the street. The sun was hot and it glanced off the hood. I adjusted the sunvisor.

"It's some lovely day, isn't it?" Ginny was wearing a skirt and puffy blouse, her shoulders bare, and a white jockey cap.

"Yes."

"We ought to get there about a quarter after three, don't you think?"

"I imagine."

"It would have been nice to start out earlier but it'll— What do you look so stern for? Here it's such a beautiful day and you sit there with the biggest frown I've ever seen."

Until Shanahan's arrival, although aware I was grasping at the impossible, I still had teased myself with the hope that for some reason John Rockey's disappearance would never be reported to the police; or that, even if it were, his name would be a card in a file and nothing more. But Shanahan, despite his friendliness, his easy-going manner, had opened a door for me, a door through which I'd looked before with other eyes while writing detective stories, and I'd caught a glimpse of the first early turning of the police machinery that would spin quicker with each passing day. Driving, I thought of the forces against me—not only men but things like two-way radios and teletypes and police laboratories—and wondered should I give myself up, if it wouldn't be better. Against the torture of waiting, arrest seemed like a long sleep.

"I'm just squinting," I answered. "The sun's in my eyes."

"Paul," she said when we were on the highway, "this . . . it's Rockey, isn't it? . . . you said something about meeting him when you were on a story. Which story was that?"

"Oh, he lived . . . he lives . . . across the hall from that"—I didn't want to say her name and yet was afraid to lie—"from that Mrs. Crisponi. You know, I did her by-line that time."

"Crisponi. Crisponi." She shrugged. "I'm afraid I can't keep

up with all your stories. But how come he came to you for money?"

"He just did, that's all."

"I guess it's that rich look you have." Then in a serious voice, "Paul, what do you think could have happened to him?"

"How would I know?"

". . . You should, shouldn't you?"

Making myself look ahead, "What do you mean by that remark?"

"Well, you do write mystery stories, don't you . . .? Oh, Paul, take a deep breath!"

I did, begrudging it to myself.

"Doesn't the air smell good?"

"Yes." I filled my lungs again. Now I wanted to keep breathing it in.

"You know what?" she said after a while. "You look better already. You've lost that frown and— Sorry I brung yuh, huh?"

"No . . . I'm not sorry."

"I love this ride. I wish the summer weren't over. I wish it was just beginning. We'd do things like this more often. Just take off and— Don't you wish we had it to do over?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes," I said again.

"Next summer's going to be different," she promised.

The road was almost empty; but at the turn-off to Matoisset Lake, a circle that was the hub of several highways, we were joined by many cars. People drove in their bathing suits; there were kids with inner tubes and deflated plastic rafts. The tar road leading to the lake was sticky from the sun and the tyres made blubbery noises. Picnic benches appeared under the trees. Arrows pointed to the parking lot and to the artificial beach that fronted the lake here.

The parking lot was jammed. We could see scores of people on the beach, and heads bobbing in the water; farther out, swimmers were clambering over the raft with the diving board on it.

"I was hoping it wouldn't be this way," Ginny said, disappointed.

"So was I. I don't think I'm up to the excitement."

"Let's see if we can get to the other side of the lake. There should be some way."

I made a turn on the lot. A few hundred yards back there was

a dirt cut-off through the trees and I headed into it. The lane twisted to the lake and then followed its curve. We drove past the noise, past the people, past small cottages with screened porches and canoes on the grass. The woods became thicker; the sun barely seeped through. After about a mile the lane swerved away from the lake, probably in the direction of the highway. I pulled off it and stopped on a slight incline.

We walked through the trees, perhaps for a hundred yards. Then we broke into a clearing at the lake's edge. We were in a small cove, sheltered on three sides by pine trees and foliage. Across the lake was the roll of wooded hills while far to our left, out of sight and hearing, were the beach and its tumult. The water was a rich blue with a dazzle of sun across it: it curled against the grass with a serene lapping, and this was the only sound.

"Paul, isn't . . . isn't it beautiful?"

I nodded and could say nothing.

"I'm afraid if I blink it will disappear," she said in awe.

We got everything from the car and spread the blanket over the grass. Ginny took her bathing suit and went among the trees. I put on my trunks and sat on the blanket, hands clasped on my knees. I didn't hear her come out or even know she was standing next to me until she said, "Do you want to go in the water now?"

I looked up. She was wearing a black one-piece suit and she was tying the straps around her neck.

"In a moment."

"You look so dreamy." She came down on one knee. "What do you see out there, Paul?"

All the places I've never been and all the things I haven't done. . . .

" . . . Nothing. Nothing that you don't see."

"That's not what your eyes say."

"Don't listen to my eyes." I stood up and helped her to her feet. "Let's go in the water."

We walked to the lake. The water coiled around our ankles and was cold. Ginny put on her cap and fastened it. She wet her thighs and face and arms. She grasped my hand and we walked out together. The water was clear and it deepened quickly. It smelled of pine. She let go of my hand and dived forward and came up, shaking water off her face. She waved. "It's delicious once you get in!" I swam to her. The water was numbing until you got used to it and then it was good. We

swam out until we could see the beach far around the bend of the lake, and then raced back. I felt reborn. I didn't ever want to leave but Ginny was becoming cold: her teeth clicked and her lips turned colour but she still didn't want to give in to it. I insisted she go out and then she splashed water on my face and struggled to shore. I ran after her and caught her and picked her up and set her down on the grass. She was shivering and laughing. I rubbed her back and arms until the goose flesh disappeared. We lay on our sides now, facing each other. The sun was bright and warm.

"How do you feel?" I asked.

"Wonderful."

". . . It is good, isn't it?"

"Hungry?"

"Not yet. Just let's lie here a while. The grass is so cool and soft. And I like to look at you."

"Still? After all this time?"

". . . Yes."

"That was a nice little sigh. . . . Your eyes are saying something again."

"What do they say?"

". . . I don't know." She said it in a strange puzzled way.

"Ginny"—I curled a blade of grass around a finger and plucked it out—"Ginny, let's never quarrel again in our lives."

"But we haven't—"

"Oh, I know how we've been lately. I've been irritable and cranky and—— But no more. No more quarrels ever again. Life's too short for quarrels and unhappiness." I sat up. I had to talk, I had to get it out of me. "You asked me before what I was seeing across the lake. And that's what I saw—how short life is and how stupid we can be. Ginny, there's so much to do, so much to enjoy!" I looked around and there was a swelling in my throat. "Everything could be so beautiful."

"Isn't it, Paul?"

"It is, it is. But most of us . . . we just don't see. Most of us act like we . . . live for ever."

"Come here, lie next to me." I did and she put her arm across me. "Now talk to me."

"Ginny, tell me you love me." It was urgent I hear.

"Of course, of course I do, Paul."

"I want you to tell me you'll always love me,"

"You know I always will."

"Promise me that!"

"I don't have——"

"Please promise me."

"I promise, darling."

"Ginny, I . . . I want you to know this. I want you to know that I've always tried to do good."

"I know you have, Paul."

"But sometimes . . . sometimes wanting to be good can . . . it can make you do bad things."

"But you've never been bad to me, darling."

" . . . It can drive you crazy, wanting to be good," I said in a low voice.

"That's a strange thing to say." She frowned but then shook her head. "No, but maybe it isn't at all. To be good . . . as far back as I can remember, that's always what I've wanted to be. And sometimes it made me suffer terribly. When I was younger, especially. I wanted my parents to be proud of me and never to be ashamed of me. I wanted to deserve them. Paul, I remember how I used to pray to God to make me good, to keep me from being bad or . . . or having bad thoughts. I used to pray to Him to make me everything my parents thought I was."

"And were you ever really bad?"

"I guess . . . I guess not, but then . . . oh, there were times I thought no other girl, no decent girl, had the feelings, the dreams—all the confused desires—that I had. I used to think of myself as so wicked, so completely wicked."

"Oh, Ginny, why should we be ashamed of being human beings?"

"Ashamed?"

"Why should we feel so guilty for what we are? We look around us and we say we love beautiful things, yet the beautiful things within us can seem ugly and wrong. How can we truly love . . . love anything . . . if we actually fear those emotions that make us human—if we actually hate ourselves? Ginny, there's so much within us, so much power and strength, so much we're capable of, so . . . so very much we don't even know about! So much that's good and right . . . but it can turn bad, Ginny, our own fears and guilts can turn it bad, so that it . . . it constricts our lives and can lead us to . . . to anything," I finished in a whisper. ". . . Ginny?"

"Yes . . . yes, darling," she answered huskily.

"What do my eyes say now?"

"They——" She swallowed.

"Do they tell you you're my heart?"

She nodded, staring.

"Ginny, do they ask you to trust me, to believe in me?"

"... Yes."

"And will you always believe in me?"

"Oh, darling, yes!"

I touched her cheek where it was still wet and she turned her face and kissed my hand. I put both arms around her then. I held her and thought I was going to cry. This was a moment of our lives I wanted her to remember always; if ever she found out about the murder, about Claire Crisponi, I wanted her to think of this day and know that I tried to explain everything in my own way.

"Oh, Ginny, how I love you!"

"Say it again, Paul."

"I love you, I love you. I love you and I never want to hurt you."

"You could never hurt me, darling." She flattened her cheek against mine. "Paul?"

"Yes."

"We . . . I don't think we've been so . . . so close in such a long time. You haven't held me this way in . . . months. You've held me but . . . not in just this way. Or told me you loved me. You've said that to me more in an hour than you have in . . . months also. You're so——"

"What?"

"So different. Different maybe than I've ever known you. You seem to have fallen in love with the world again. . . . And I think you've fallen in love with me again also."

"But I've always——"

"Oh, I know you've always loved me—but it's . . . I just can't explain it. It's just something I feel. It's the way you look at me. It's the way you look at the sky too, or how you were looking across the lake before. It's everything you've said. . . . Or perhaps it's me, Paul—I don't know—or perhaps it's this place or everything combined. But whatever it is, you're something of a stranger to me now . . . and I can't say I don't like it. Paul, maybe it's good that husbands and wives should come to each other now and then as strangers. Maybe it's good that people should keep falling in love with each other over and over again. . . . Darling, you smell so delicious."

"Let me kiss you. Can I kiss you?"

"I want you to . . . Paul," she said later, "remember that night when you spoke to me about Cape Cod?"

The night I'd first been with Claire Crisponi. "Yes," I said, "I remember."

"Remember all the plans we made? We were going to do so many things. We were close that night too. After that . . . that's when . . . after that I think we changed a little. . . . No, I'm not saying it's your fault. Most likely it was mine . . . or both our faults. Or maybe neither of us is to blame. I think we changed or drifted apart without even realising it. I guess it can happen to married people, can't it? You get ordinary, you fall in a rut, you . . . you lose sight of things. . . . What I'm trying to say is that I've missed you, darling. I never actually realised how much I've missed you . . . Paul, kiss me again. It was good the way you kissed me."

Our mouths came together. They met gently; then they opened. I breathed into her and she into me. Her tongue trembled forward; I drew it in, and now each explored the other. Then she slid her lips away, breathing against my ear.

"Paul, I feel so . . . strange."

"Come back to me," I whispered. She turned her head and I kissed every part of her face and she could not hold it still. And then she kissed me on the lips and eyelids. ". . . Yes, Ginny, on the cheek, bite me that way on the cheek."

". . . Why do I like to bite you?"

"Because you love me."

"I want to kiss it and . . . and make it better."

"Yes, kiss it and make it better. Then bite it and make it hurt again."

". . . Paul, I can hardly . . . breathe . . . *Oh, Paul!*" Her body tightened perceptibly as I untied the straps. In a weak voice, "Here?"

"Darling, who's going to see us—the sky, the sun? Who's going to tell on us—the trees, the grass, the lake?"

"Oh, Paul!"

She sat up and clutched me. I stroked her hair and kissed it. "And what will they see, Ginny, and what can they say—that here are two people who are in love, two people who are unashamed of their love, two people who . . . who need each other, who need love?"

I felt my eyes fill up. I held on to her and didn't want her

to see. Gradually her body relaxed in my arms. She lay back on the grass. I sat next to her and we gazed into each other's eyes. For minutes we didn't talk or move. Then I leaned over and kissed her once on the lips, raised my head and searched her eyes again. The passion in me then was not a physical thing of itself, but rather a passion for life in all its innocent nakedness: I sought in this cove, away from the world of clocks and police, the first guiltless timeless wondrous meeting of the first man and woman. I wanted to cry out: *Hurry, Ginny, love me, know me, let me love you and know you, let us seize time by the throat and make him wait a lifetime here for us!* But perhaps my eyes said it better; for when I touched her straps again, she did not protest with word or gesture and, staring at me, even lifted herself to help. Apart, but eyes still locked, we drank each other in. Then my arms drew her close. We lay very still. We did not even kiss. Her cheek was soft on mine.

"... Paul?"

"Yes, my darling."

"We're crazy, aren't we?" she murmured. "We're two crazy people."

"If we are then we've been sane too long."

"Why are we like this?"

"You tell me."

"Because we love each other?"

"Yes."

"Do all people in love . . . would they do this?"

"And even if they didn't, would we want to be everyone?"

"... No. But it is crazy and I think that's why I like it, because it is."

"Is that all it is—crazy?"

"No."

"What else is it, Ginny?"

"It's nice."

"Why is it nice?"

"Oh . . . it's nice not to be ashamed to be naked in the light. It's nice to have your arms around me. It's nice to look at the blue sky. It's nice to see the trees. It's nice, it's so very nice to be in love."

"Let me see your face."

She turned and we kissed. Her finger stirred on my shoulders. I felt her try to pull back but then come forward instead, harder this time, and her tongue darted out. Then she whirled away,

her breast rising and falling, and pressed her lips against my ear.

"Paul . . . what's . . . why am I this way? I feel drunk. My heart's beating so fast it's making me drunk . . . Paul?"

"What, my sweetheart?"

"Can I tell you something?"

"Tell me everything."

"I . . . I dreamed something like this once."

"When?"

"After . . . after that night you spoke to me about Provincetown . . . and that lonely beach. Remember . . . remember you asked me if I'd let you make love to me on that beach? That's what . . . that's what I dreamed."

"Why didn't you ever tell me?"

"I . . . I couldn't."

"Did you like me to make love to you there?"

"Oh, yes! I dreamed it just as you pictured it . . . that long empty beach and the ocean next to it and the cliff of sand. I—I think that's why I always wanted to go there, why I always remembered. . . . And, Paul?"

"Yes . . . yes, I hear."

"I dreamed something else."

"What else did you dream, Ginny?"

"Remember . . . that night . . . remember we spoke about children and what we wanted? Well, I dreamed you . . . that you gave me a baby there. And that's what I wanted. Paul," she said, looking into my eyes, "I wanted you to give me a baby there. . . . Paul?"

"What . . . Ginny?" The words came out of me haltingly.

"Look at me. Don't turn away."

"I am looking."

"You . . . you seem so strange. Did I say something wrong?"

"No . . . you didn't say anything wrong." I avoided her eyes again. A baby; to have children; a lot of children; a house alive with children. To work hard and live fully . . . what more? Oh, never for me?

"Paul, would you kiss me?"

She brought my face around. Our lips were a fraction of an inch apart. She came forward. She put her hands on the back of my head. She pressed me to her tightly. For a time I was unable to give myself. I even kept my eyes open. Then there was a great melting within me. I couldn't get close enough to

her. I wanted to be one with her, to lose my identity with her, my loneliness.

"Paul, I . . . I want to make love to you. Is it, is it terrible my wanting to make love to you?"

"Oh, no!"

I felt the spinning of the world; the ground seemed to be moving under me; it was whirling and trying to toss me off into space, and my only hope, my only salvation, was to hold on to Ginny.

". . . Paul!"

"Yes, darling."

"I . . . I want a baby, Paul, I want a baby so badly, out . . . out here, I want a baby!"

It was like a kaleidoscope turning. It turned with Ginny's fingers digging into my scalp and back; it turned with all the blocked passions inside her seeking escape, prying for ways, trying to wriggle out, poking at every part of her . . . and then bursting forth like volcanic lava. It turned, and the design, so rich, so beautiful and all-consuming, was everything I had ever searched for and needed. I lost myself in it and wanted to lose myself for ever, but it was fading and I tried to run after and hold it; but then it was gone and Ginny's voice was saying, "Paul, what happened to me, what happened to me?" and I lay silently with my face on her shoulder and the grass: *Ginny, where have you been?*

CHAPTER TWENTY

I STIRRED the next morning from a dream, and the dream was that I was still with Ginny beside the lake. Sleepily I turned on my other side to recapture it, to sink back, but something flickered distantly in my mind to remind me of John Rockey. I sprang up in bed and looked around as though for the police.

Ginny, whom I'd accidentally brushed against, opened her eyes. Then she closed them, murmuring, "What . . . time is . . . it?"

"Almost seven."

"Go back . . . sleep."

"I will. Now you sleep."

She nodded and slipped off easily. I watched her as she slept and it slowed the scalding thrusts of blood through me and I began to think of yesterday again and of all the things each of us, in wondrous discovery and rediscovery, had uncovered in the other. I thought of the great need for love each had been able to express and fulfill, and of the shame-free oneness we had found at Matoisset; and it lulled me now until I almost leaned back. But then my body grew rigid once more. My own heartbeat, as I looked at Ginny so peacefully asleep, made it hard for me to breathe. I got out of bed and went into the living-room. I sat on the edge of the sofa, arms crossed on my knees, swamped by waves of futility. Then I slammed my fist into my palm and jumped up. I wouldn't be caught, I mustn't be caught! I would fight with my last breath for freedom, for this new life I had found with Ginny, for this new happiness, for this world that had blossomed for me again in the darkness of my trouble! Yes, I would fight, I would——

Slowly I sank back on the sofa. Fight—what? Fight—how? I was finished, I was trapped! The net had already dropped over me and it was just a matter of time until it was drawn tight. I might twist and squirm, I might writhe and fool myself with motions of struggle and flight, but it was all just a matter of time.

The street was waking. An automobile started up nearby; a window closed across the way.

. . . Yet maybe not.

Not every murder was solved, was it? It was only in stories that they were. It was like Detective Ferguson had told me once. I'd asked him, what percentage of murders were unsolved, and he'd shrugged his big shoulders and said it was hard to say because no one knew how many murders were committed. Plenty of people were killed that the police didn't even know about: people were always dropping out of sight, never to be seen or heard from again, and there would be a routine missing persons' investigation but eventually a fading of police interest. The officials didn't seek a murderer every time someone vanished. Too many people disappeared for personal reasons. And the officials couldn't work on one case for ever. How could they work on one case for ever when there were always so many other crimes?

Within this city alone, who could tell how many undiscovered bodies there were? Bodies in woodland graves, in walls, at the bottom of the river.

It was a comfort, thinking of all the other bodies, speculating upon their number.

John Rockey's body was buried and without it the police couldn't prove he was dead. They might investigate the possibility—along with all the other possibilities—but they wouldn't be able to prove it. How could they? And after a while the case would be inactive. Why, I'd bet . . . I'd bet anything there were hundreds of inactive cases like it in the files. Certainly. And as for me, the police would never suspect *me*. First of all, well—well, I knew all those cops. That was still the biggest thing in my favour. And then too I'd given them a good story about the phone call Rockey had made from here. A perfectly logical story. So as long as the body was buried they had nothing to—

I lowered my cigarette. I stood up.

The things in the trunk!

Oh, Jesus, the things in the trunk!

What could I do with the things in the trunk?

All right, take it easy, be calm, don't go to pieces.

You buried a body, you can do anything.

I sat down.

It should be simple. After everything you've done, this should be simple.

There were many things you could do. You could burn the stuff, of course—but no, not outside, someone might see. There mustn't be anything to attract suspicion. And anyway, would the shower curtain burn? There'd be a lot of smoke and—Then how about the city dump? Where was it? And wouldn't people be around? And how could you just leave the things there? . . . The river? The river might do. But those things would float; wouldn't they float? . . . Oh, hell, dump it all down a sewer and—but they dredged sewers, didn't they, and they might be able to trace everything!

I was on my feet again.

A person with nothing to fear, nothing to hide, can take a piece of paper from his pocket and crumble it and toss it on the street and forget all about it. He can drop it in a waste-basket or in someone's rubbish can. But this, the residue of my crime, was like fly-paper on my fingers.

I smoked and steadied myself. •

I would do something with the things. Maybe I couldn't come up with anything now, but I would. When I had to, I would.

I went into the kitchen and turned on the radio. A news programme was just going off. Another wouldn't be on for fifteen minutes. I sat down to wait. I drummed my fingers on the table, then got up. I couldn't wait. I walked into the bedroom. Ginny was still sleeping and I took my clothes and got dressed in the living-room. Then I went to the store for a paper.

Mr. Drews was arranging patent medicines on a shelf.

"What're you doing up so early, Paul?" he wanted to know. "I thought writers stayed up all night and slept all day. . . . The later ones are on the bottom," he pointed out as I bent over the newspaper pile.

I pulled one out and paid him. Standing there, I scanned the front page. Nothing. •

"Looking for a new murder to write about, eh?" he laughed.

I turned the page. And at the bottom of the third page, on the next to the last column:

PARALYTIC VANISHES

Police are investigating the disappearance of John Rockey, 28, who has been missing since Thursday from his home at 3467 Gorman St.

Rockey, who is paralysed from the waist down but is dexterous in the use of crutches, was last seen leaving his house and entering a cab.

His mother, Mrs. Stella Rockey, said that he had seemed moody and irritable the morning he disappeared.

"Nothing hot?" Mr. Drews asked.

I shook my head and turned to leave. Mr. Drews called to ask how Ginny was, but I was already out the door.

I stood on the corner, waiting impatiently for a line of cars to pass. I had to keep myself from dashing between them in a mad rush home. I stood, but everything inside me was running.

The newspaper story wasn't much, it said nothing that should have excited or worried me, yet the sight of John Rockey's name in print had an electrifying effect—as much of a one, in its own way, as had Detective Shanahan's visit. Or perhaps it was because that visit had been dulled by the hours while this was something new. But I could picture the story growing day by day and moving from the third page to the second and then to the first. My crime was the public's now.

I stepped off the kerb, even though I couldn't cross yet, and waved cars by—at the same time analysing the story, trying to read meaning into what it said and didn't say. I wondered then why it hadn't revealed that Rockey had been to see me, and if the police had purposely kept that information secret and, if so, for what reason. Why? Why?

As I hurried across, a rubbish truck rumbled into our driveway and stopped at the first house. It was one of those huge tank-like affairs into which the refuse is drawn by revolving blades. Immediately I thought of what was in my trunk. Gone was all logic. I didn't know if it would be wise to dispose of the things in this way, nor did I care. All I wanted was to be able to pull the stickiness off my fingers and be clean. I ran home.

I peered down the driveway and saw that the truck had come up only a few houses. A man walked at the rear of it, piling the rubbish on to the truck's blades. I had to be quick.

A half-empty carton stood next to the garage. I dragged it inside and opened the trunk of my car. I dumped out the paper that was in the bottom of the carton and then cleaned out the trunk. I began to stuff the things inside, but the one whole crutch wouldn't fit. I could hear the truck coming closer. I grabbed the crutch and smashed it against the floor and it

splintered diagonally and I finished the job over my knee. I jammed everything into the carton but then began to have doubts about my suit, for that was one thing that definitely could be traced, and I pulled it out, taking the rest with it, and threw it on the ground. Then I piled everything inside again and threw the paper on top.

I dragged the carton outside just as the truck pulled up.

The man walking at the rear, in an undershirt and with hairy shoulders and wearing gloves, nodded at me. He picked up the carton and put it on the truck. I watched the truck move on. The carton slid in slowly. It disappeared.

I felt giddy with freedom.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

GINNY was up when I peered in the room. She watched me intently as I walked in and sat next to her on the bed. I kissed her and she kept her eyes open. They seemed disturbed.

I said, "Why are you looking at me like that?"

She shook her head. She found my hand and pressed it.

"Is it . . . about yesterday? Didn't I . . . make you happy?"

"Oh, Paul!" She lifted herself and hugged me. She held on and then let go and lay back.

I said, "What is it, Ginny?"

"It's nothing," she insisted.

"Didn't I make you happy?"

"You did, you know you did."

"How can I know when you don't tell me?"

". . . Paul?"

"What, darling?"

"Maybe——" then she checked herself. "Oh, I'm going to get this all wrong and I feel like an idiot." She glanced up. "Paul, you made me happy. You did. I can't remember when I was ever so . . . so happy. And yet that's such a weak word for it. Happy. But everything happened so suddenly and I know it's right and I know it's beautiful, yet it's got me all confused. I've been lying here in bed and I've been thinking——"

"What about?"

"Why I felt the way I did."

"How did you feel?"

"I . . . well, I wanted to do such things. I wanted to bite you, I wanted to scratch you and I . . . I even wanted to say things. Things you . . . you see written on walls."

"You did, you know."

"Yes." Then, as an afterthought, "I did, didn't I? I was like a wild woman."

"Did you feel like one then?"

". . . No. I wasn't thinking then. I . . . I was floating. I was just something being tossed about and I never wanted to come

back to earth. No, I wasn't thinking. That's what I remember mostly, not thinking . . . Paul?"

"What, honey?"

"Am I too passionate?"

"No."

"Come here. Hold me."

Her head was against my shoulder now.

". . . Paul?"

"Yes, dear."

"If we have a baby . . . do you want a baby?"

". . . Yes."

"Why did you have to think?"

"I said yes, I said yes!"

She held me away. "Paul, what's——"

"Nothing," I said. "I . . . want you to have a baby."

"I'm glad." She brought me to her again. "I'm so very glad." We lay quietly. Soon I could feel her heart starting faster. "Paul?"

"Yes, my darling."

"I love you."

"I know you do."

"And you love me."

"How can you tell?"

"I can . . . Paul?" She spoke my name in a different voice.

"Yes, my darling."

". . . I'm not too passionate?"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you mean I'm just right?"

"Just perfect."

". . . Paul?"

"What, my love?"

"Then . . . then why . . ."

"Why what, honey?"

It came out of her in a choked cry. "Then why do I want you now?"

Ginny left the apartment before lunch to go to a "shower" for one of her friends. Nervously I wandered from room to room. Being with Ginny enabled me to forget for a time; but once alone all the fears and anxieties surged back. Had I left anything undone? Pacing, I tried to think. Nothing. I'd covered my trail the best I could. There was nothing more I—

"She's pretty cruddy under the fenders, Mr. Weiler," the service station attendant had said.

Oh, Lord, still on my car was the dirt of Taberton Hollow!

And the police had ways of making comparison tests: they could tell where the dirt came from.

I threw my head back, grimacing as though struck. Would I never be through? Would I never be clean, never be free of it? Good God, when? WHEN? It took the most strained concentration to force myself to think what to do with the car; but soon, as always before, the necessity of a job to be done braced me.

I decided to wash the car myself instead of giving it away and attracting unnecessary attention to it again. I went down to the basement and got the hose I knew was there and took it out to the garage where there was an inside faucet. My car was parked at a slight angle in the garage. Droplets of crusted filth hung from the undersides of the fenders.

Mementoes of Taberton Hollow.

Mementoes of the blackness there and the dry-clashing trees and dragging a human body through weeds and scooping out soft dirt for a grave. Reliving this now, it all seemed so terrifyingly impossible to me that I did not know how I could have done it, and it made me afraid of myself. Hurriedly so as not to think about it any more I turned the nozzle of the hose and the water jetted out, rumbling against the metal. I washed the entire car and afterwards unscrewed the hose and stepped with it out of the garage and into the warm sunshine. The good sunshine where it's hard to be afraid of yourself.

After putting away the hose and changing into dry slacks, I walked into Mr. Drews' store for another paper. But this edition surprisingly enough had nothing in it about Rocky, though it took several scannings of each page to convince me. Having prepared myself for an even larger story, I felt oddly let down and wondered if it possibly could have been dropped for some police reason. But damn it, that was silly, wasn't it? What undoubtedly had happened was that, considered so routine, the tiny story had been squeezed off the pages by the pressure of other news. That was it, of course. Why was I always searching for the dark side? I should be *relieved*.

It was about five minutes after I came home and was in the bathroom washing my hands that I heard the slam of a car door. There were no insignificant sounds in my world any longer

and I hurried to the front window. Parked at the kerb was a black car with a short erect antenna on its roof, and looking up at the apartment was the long slender face of Detective Shanahan. Another man was with him. Although I started to draw back, Shanahan saw me and flicked his fingers against the brim of his Panama. He motioned that they'd be right up.

I stood nailed, arms extended as though not knowing in which direction to flee.

Footsteps on the stairs and muffled voices.

I ran to the door and fell against it. A creaking outside, like someone shifting his weight from side to side and waiting for the door to open. My flesh was prickly. I grasped the knob. My only small comfort was a feeling of thankfulness that Ginny wasn't home, and I thought how I would ask the officers to take me away quickly without a neighbourhood scene. I didn't want anyone to see: this suddenly became the most unbearable part of it—people staring. Pulling the door open, I stepped back.

"How you doin', chief?"

There was no hostility in Detective Shanahan's whining voice; none on his face.

"Mr. Shanahan." I had wanted to say, "Hello, Mr. Shanahan," but that was all that came out.

He walked past me without another word and his companion followed. I closed the door but hung on to the knob as the officers faced me.

"This is Detective Ruppel from the Third," Shanahan said. "Weiler's the one that writes them true detective things," he explained. "You know them stories, don't you? You should," he added with a short laugh, "you got a locker full of 'em."

Ruppel didn't seem impressed. He was a massive man with a small face, a button of a chin and a puffy throat. He wore a grey felt: it was a department regulation that every detective wear a hat on duty. Beneath the sharply snapped brim his round green eyes surveyed me unblinkingly. He kept his hands in the pockets of his dark double-breasted suit, thumbs out. Occasionally his cheeks moved as he sucked on a piece of hard candy. Ruppel was all business here.

"You don't mind a few more questions, do you, chief?" Shanahan asked. "This thing's turning into a goddam pain in the neck."

I let go the knob. His tone, everything about him, was reassuring. Ruppel though remained a worry. He was not a man to me; he was a Presence. His eyes were no longer on me; they were trying to take in the entire apartment.

"Do you . . . care to sit down?" I'd had to clear my throat.

"Nah, this'll only take a few minutes. There's just a couple things we're after. Look"—Shanahan emphasised his words with both hands—"look, do you remember Rocky mentioning the name 'Lou'?"

"Lou?" I stalled for time, debating what to say. I wanted to tell them something that would lead them away from me but was afraid it might boomerang.

"Yeah," said Shanahan. "When he was on the phone. Did you happen to hear the name Lou? I know you told me before you didn't hear anything but I thought maybe the name would bring something back."

"Lou," I repeated again. Then I shook my head. "I'm afraid I didn't, Mr. Shanahan."

"How about the Hotel Cleve? Did he say anything about that—like going there or meeting someone there?"

". . . No." But now, without knowing why, I was sorry I hadn't answered yes to both questions.

"Aaah nuts!" Shanahan looked disgustedly at Ruppel who was sucking quietly on the candy. Back to me, "His old lady told us he had a quarrel with this guy in the neighbourhood who's a fag. We thought maybe——" He let it go at that, rubbed his neck like he was trying to think of other questions and then appealed to me with, "Look, chief, you sure he didn't say anything what he wanted the dough for?"

"No, he didn't, Mr. Shanahan."

"And you say he looked worried?"

Had I told him that? Why couldn't I remember? ". . . I think so. I think that was my impression anyway."

"What do you mean 'you think'?" Detective Ruppel spoke up. He had an effortless way of speaking that was neither accusatory nor harsh, yet was both. His thumbs jiggled over his pockets.

"Well, it's just that . . . well, it's . . . it's hard to recall exactly and I want . . . I want to get things right. I'd say he did look worried," I said at last, flustered and my face burning.

"How do you know Rocky?" His eyes scanned me.

I turned to Shanahan, partly to avoid those eyes. "I told you, didn't I?" Back to Ruppel. "I met him on a story."

"What's that mean?"

"Well, on a case. Like Mr. Shanahan told you, I write these detective stories and I met him on one of them."

"You mean he was involved in something?" Ruppel frowned.

"No, Bill," Shanahan answered for me. "I checked on this with Rocky's old lady. Weiler here wrote up that Crisponi story. Remember that guy that buried the body in Taberton Hollow? Well, Mrs. Crisponi——"

I dug my hands in my pockets.

"—lives across the hall from the Rockeys. . . . Ruppel's new on this," Shanahan said to me.

"How come he came to you for money?" was Ruppel's next question.

"I don't know. He just did."

"What time was he over here?"

"About . . . about eleven."

"How long did he stay?"

"Till about a quarter after." Why was I being asked these same questions? Was he trying to trap me into a lie?

"And you say he called someone?"

"That's right."

"Where were you when he made the call?"

"I was"—I knew what was coming and yet couldn't think fast enough to skirt it—"in the living-room."

"You were both in the same room, right? And you mean to say you didn't hear him mention a name?"

"I—I didn't hear any if he did."

"What was the conversation?"

"He just told this . . . this person to meet him outside the house."

"Just like that. A call. Doesn't ask for anyone by name. Just meet him outside the house."

". . . Yes."

Ruppel glanced at Shanahan and his cheeks drew in on the candy. His gaze returned to me. "And when did he leave?"

"Right after the call." The lie was on my face; I knew it was on my face. I felt myself crumbling. *I'll confess, I'll get it over and confess!*

"This was what time?" His teeth began to grind the candy.

"About a quarter after." I spoke each word deliberately; I had to keep myself from shouting them out.

"Did you see a car come for him?"

"No, I didn't." Then, bursting out of me, "My God, I told Mr. Shanahan all this! Why do you keep asking the same things!"

"Take it easy, chief, take it easy," Shanahan soothed. "Bill's here doing a job. You know we got to hand in a report. It's got to be right."

". . . I'm sorry, Mr. Shanahan."

Rupple continued without a change of expression, seemingly oblivious of my outburst and apology. "Then you didn't see anyone pick him up?"

"No, sir, no I didn't."

"Did you see him standing out there at all?"

"No."

"You mean you didn't even look out the window once?"

". . . No. I had, I had work to do. I——"

"Say, chief," Shanahan interrupted, "weren't you even a little curious?"

"I was too busy to think about him any more, Mr. Shanahan," I said earnestly. Emotionally I was coming to believe my own story.

"Jesus, you'd think the least you'd do is look out the window to make sure the guy's out there." Shanahan shrugged as though he was unable to understand some people, and I could sense his drawing away from me and becoming slightly more impersonal.

But Rupple abruptly let the subject drop. "You know if anyone is home downstairs?"

". . . No." I scanned his face, wondering why he'd want to talk with Dr. Michaels—Dr. Michaels who had heard the sounds of my crime.

"No he is or no he ain't?"

"I—I just don't know."

Shanahan said to me, "We want to find out if maybe someone saw Rockey get in a car." His voice was friendly again. To Rupple, "I guess that's it, don't you, Bill?"

"I guess."

Shanahan extended his hand; he didn't seem to notice how cold mine was. "Take it easy, chief, no one meant to offend you. You know how these damn things are. And, incidentally, I haven't forgotten, I want to get together with you on that story I told you about." He released my hand and looked up at Rupple. "Okay, Bill?"

Rupple nodded to me before he left.

I waited by the closed door as they went downstairs. I heard them knocking on the door to Dr. Michaels' apartment. They knocked three times and during each interval I wondered why I didn't go mad, why I hugged life and sanity so tenaciously. I felt that it was within my own power to let myself go insane.

Their knocking unanswered, the officers were leaving the house.

Rushing to the window, I saw them walk next door. They came out soon and entered the house to the right, then went across the street to a few houses there. After about fifteen minutes they headed towards their car. I drew back from the window. The motor started. Only when I heard the car pull away did I look out. Exhaust fumes trailed it down the street. Then it turned the corner and was gone.

I remained a while by the window, then sat at my desk. All I could think of was what I had foreseen after Shanahan's first visit: the investigation constantly increasing in tempo, spreading out and then inexorably closing in: many Detective Ripples, efficient, business-like, closing in.

I stood up and walked back and forth across the living-room. This helped, and soon I began to draw on hope again in the form of all the old assurances: that the body was buried and that without a corpse the police could not even establish the fact of murder. Why should I be more worried now? I'd just seen how much of a blind alley the police were in. They had absolutely nothing on me. And they could question me a dozen times more and still would have nothing. So long as the body was—

... But had I buried it right?

An electric buzzer against my heart.

Had I left part of it uncovered? Had I dropped anything on the lane that might be found and traced to me?

I was pacing again. *It's never over, you're never through!*

Walking from one end of the room to the other, I kept trying to assure myself that nothing had been left undone; but it wasn't working. And then the impulse came on me to go back, to revisit Taberton Hollow, to see for myself.

I wanted to run out to the car and drive there quickly.

But how could I go back? How could I ever return *there*?

Never! Even if my life depended on it—never!

And anyway I had buried it well. And if I had dropped

anything important, certainly I would have missed it. Wouldn't I have missed it? . . .

I was sprawled across the sofa when Ginny came home. The reaction to the detectives' visit had left me nerve-drained. She started to tell me about the shower but saw I was hardly listening. She asked what was wrong and I said it was nothing. She was certain I was still concerned about Davenport and worried also about finding new markets.

"Paul, I'm definitely going back to work. They'll take me on again. If not . . . I can always find a new job."

"We'll . . . talk about it. It's . . . not that anyway."

"Then what is it?"

"Nothing. I'm probably . . . just in a mood."

I wished I could tell her. I wished too I could say: leave me, Ginny, for your own sake leave me; I've never deserved you; all I've done is . . . ruin your life.

But I couldn't. I had to cling on.

It was her suggestion much later that we go to Giambro's. We hadn't been there since before we were married and I was glad she thought of it: it held a nostalgic happiness for me, and perhaps a few hours of forgetting.

Giambro was there once again to greet us just inside the massive red door with the golden hinges, but this time instead of standing he was seated at a table across which lay a gnarled cane. He had suffered a slight stroke, but his face was as beautifully ugly as ever, his high spirits unchanged. The table was his throne: he would bang the cane on the floor to alert a waitress or the girl at the record player. When not otherwise occupied, he would hum to the music, head swaying, now and then drawing it out with his fingers.

I ordered a bottle of zinfandel and asked for the same aria from *Bohème* that Ginny requested the last time, though I didn't realise it until she reminded me; and later over strong thick Italian coffee and more wine we smoked cigarettes. A flower man came in and I bought a single rose for Ginny and he clipped off the stem and pinned it to her lapel. He spoke almost no English at all, but through it we understood that he had been with La Scala in Milan before "the accident", and Ginny asked if he'd sing for us and he said he would later; and afterwards, when more people came in, he did: he accompanied several Mario Lanza records in a powerful but uncertain

voice, singing with his eyes closed and exuberant gestures; and, as I wondered what he could be thinking, he bowed low to the applause and picked up his flower box and made many sales. Then a young man with little voice but much gusto leaped up and sang *Vesta La Giubba* and he too was followed by another enthusiast at the same table. The singing was bad, but it was fun; and through it all came the occasional thunder of Giambro's cane.

The place got smoky and crowded, and we were light-headed from the wine and excitement and the music which Giambro always insisted be played loud. This had become my world: its entirety was music and talk and wine and cigarettes; the night was outside and yet so far away. But then about nine o'clock a form came in from that outer world, bringing a little bit of its darkness with him. It was a newspaper boy and he wandered from table to table. As soon as I saw him, the music seemed to die; and when the boy came to our table I shook my head, because I didn't want to know, and when he lingered I fairly shouted, "I said I don't want a paper!" The boy shrugged and Ginny frowned at me.

I took a swallow of wine and made a ritual of flicking ash in the tray.

But surreptitiously I watched the boy as he circled the room.

When he headed toward the door I couldn't hold out any longer and I called him and met him half-way.

I scanned the paper, standing.

John Rockey was back in the news. It was almost the exact story that had been in the morning edition, only a small half-column photograph had been added.

And the story had crept forward to the second page.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE red door that closed behind us nipped off the music and we walked up the steps leading to the sidewalk. The night was brisk; it was almost 'an autumn night. A crooked white moon was balancing almost perfectly on the rooftops; the sky was free of city haze and the stars were bright.

"How's your headache, Paul?"

I nodded, almost forgetting that that had been my excuse for leaving.

"Does that mean good or bad?"

"It'll be all right," I said.

We walked toward the car. I thought how every eye in Giambro's seemed to have been on me as I read the paper. It was foolish, but I couldn't help thinking it.

"Do you want me to drive, Paul?"

"No, I'll drive."

"Sure you feel all right?"

"The headache's going away. All I probably needed was fresh air."

In the car I lighted a cigarette. Ginny's voice said, "Didn't you forget someone?" and she held out her hand. I mumbled an apology and shook one out of the pack for her. I started the motor and headed for home.

Why didn't I kill myself? Why struggle, why go on?

You keep thinking this. You take suicide and play it up in your mind until it becomes a deliverance. There always is a way out. In a moment everything will be all over, and then a sleeping for ever.

"That flower man must have had a magnificent voice," Ginny said. "I wonder what happened to him. It's a pity, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "it is a pity."

But how would I do it?

You think of all the ways. You run down the list and check them off one by one, like a grocery slip. But it will have to be easy and painless. Like sleeping pills. Sleeping pills, of course.

But would you need a prescription, and how many would it take?

"Isn't it a beautiful night, Paul?"

"... Yes. Yes, it is."

"You sound sleepy."

Would they be able to tell you'd killed yourself? That's something you don't want. For Ginny's sake and for your parents' . . . and somehow, oddly enough, even for yourself: you see yourself looking on from somewhere, watching them standing over your body. You don't want shame for anyone, nor do you want anyone to suspect that body of John Rocky's murder.

"Paul, how do you think I'd look if I let my hair grow? I was thinking——"

Yet death is a dreamless sleep and there is no knowing, no watching, no fearing; it is a nothingness for ever. You sleep and the world and its troubles spin.

"—I'm serious, Paul. I've really been giving it thought. I used to wear my hair long, you know. You've seen those pictures, haven't you?"

But *could* I kill myself?

You picture the scene. You see yourself in the bath-room, alone. Pill after pill and you drink water: *now I lay me down to die.*

"Haven't you, Paul?"

"Yes, I've seen them."

"Do you think I ought to let it grow?"

"Anything you want, Ginny."

The life goes out of you with each pill, and you've got to take another. Would you lose consciousness immediately? Do you take them until you fall? Do you stagger back to bed?

"I think you ought at least to have an opinion," Ginny said.

"Any way you wear it I'll like it," I said, looking at her.

"That," she said, "is what I wanted to hear."

Oh, how I didn't want to die!

"Paul, does your head still hurt? You're wincing."

"It's . . . just now and then. It's going away . . . Ginny! Sit real close to me."

She moved over and put her arm through mine. I squeezed it. Oh, how I didn't want to die!

Why not just step on the gas and drive somewhere far? Hide, start over. The Midwest. California.

And your picture in all the post offices and people hungry for rewards.

The world is flat to a murderer and is covered with grease.

We were coming closer to home but I didn't want to go there yet. My brain was a buzz saw. I'd put suicide off. Not permanently but just a little farther in the distance. It would be a final way out, when there was nothing more, no hope, no anything; when I knew they were coming for me.

But I was alive, I could breathe, I had my wife by my side; and damn it to hell, goddam it to hell, while there was life—

Thinking of Taberton Hollow, your real hope, and how well you buried the body. . . .

Could I go back? I should go back.

You try to fight it; you tell yourself there's no purpose to it, that it's crazy, that something might happen. You don't even know what you'd do when you got there, if you'd have courage enough to go in; but that's unimportant; all that matters is just looking at Taberton Hollow even from a distance. You want to see the place again, you want to make sure of the trees, if it's as lonely as you thought; and it, perhaps, the police were guarding it—as they would if the body were found.

You shouldn't go, and yet you know you will.

But you try to be logical and manage to hold off a while.

. . . Then you head the car in the direction.

"Where are you going, Paul?" Ginny asked in surprise, lifting her head from my shoulder.

"Do you mind a little ride? It's too early to go to sleep."

"Do you really feel that good now?"

"I'm fine, I tell you."

A dozen times you're tempted to go home. Your fingers grip the wheel; they struggle against turning back. You keep reassuring yourself: what harm in just looking from a distance? And soon, without realising it, you are going faster.

"Paul, where are you rushing to? We've got nowhere to go. Let's just enjoy the ride."

I slowed down, thinking of something else. How many times had I written the sentence—"the criminal returned to the scene of the crime"? A corny line and I'd never given it any real thought. I did now though.

It's like a woman you have to see. It is Claire Crisponi in a way, all over again.

Familiar streets, and we were approaching the Hollow. Why had I come? What was the purpose?

Ahead, breaking like a mirage, was the Hollow: down the incline from the fringing street, clusters of trees that were phosphorescent in the moonlight. •

"Paul, where are we?"

How had I made myself go down there?

It seems impossible. You think of the dry swirling leaves and the rising wind and digging a grave and dragging out a dead man. You think of the raindrops on your neck and hands, and how you burrowed out the grave. You forget the forces that propelled you. You become afraid of yourself again. You ask: do I deserve to live? It is a question that's been waiting within you to be asked.

And you don't know the answer.

". . . Paul?"

"What? What?"

"I asked you where are we."

"I don't know."

"Isn't it lonely out here?"

". . . Yes."

I drove along the fringing street, seeking the lane.

"This," said Ginny, "must be a smoocher's paradise. Do you feel like smooching?"

The headlights spotted the lane as we rounded a curve. The car crept and drew closer. I almost stopped when we came on it. I wanted to speed on and not look; yet I idled past and peered down.

You remember the sound of the body sliding forward in the trunk.

"I don't like this place," Ginny said. "It's scary. I'm glad I'm with you."

I U-turned and came back.

"Paul, what are you doing?"

Her voice startled me; I'd forgotten she was with me.

"I just want to see something."

I peered down again. Now I wanted to turn in. One quick look and I would be assured; I'd know then that I was safe. Perhaps all it needed was a little more dirt; just a little more dirt. . . .

"Paul, are you trying to park in some Lovers' Lane with me?" she laughed.

You think: can you make yourself go in? You don't know. But you've got to try.

I drove off that street and stopped on another, about a block away. There were houses here.

"What are you stopping for?"

"I need cigarettes."

"Is there a store——"

"Back there. I'll walk over. I'll be right back."

"Don't look so serious," she said.

"I'll . . . I'll be back in a minute."

I slipped out and walked away. I looked once to make sure she wasn't watching. Quicker strides. My hands were in my pockets; I was cold but not from the air. Now I stood on the corner, facing Taberton Hollow.

All you have to do, you tell yourself, is run across the fields and into the woods. Just one fast look and you'll be satisfied. You'll be able to rest easy, you'll be able to *live*.

But I was fixed to the pavement.

You try to push yourself. You even make many false starts. Forces pull at you from every direction. But one thing more than anything else holds you back; you're thinking: what if the body is uncovered? You picture a decomposing face. You see flesh greenish in the moonlight: you smell its putrescence. And that does it: you start to go back. Then you stop and once more you look. Somehow, this time, this look assures you. Maybe it's the excuse you give yourself for not going in. But now the clustered trees of Taberton Hollow have become your friends where once they terrified you; the high weeds are your friends, too, and the blackness and the loneliness. Taberton Hollow stands as a citadel to protect you.

I hurried back to the car.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE next morning I got up early and went downstairs for the paper: it was always delivered on Sundays. I started taking it apart on the way back up and I spread it out on the kitchen table. It took me some time to find John Rockey's story for, though it was still on the second page of the news section, it had undergone a comforting transformation: it was now lumped together with an account of another disappearance, that of a parochial schoolgirl who had vanished yesterday on the way home from a movie matinée. Because her disappearance was the more recent, it was made the lead to the story while John Rockey's ("Also still missing is . . .") was an unsinister paragraph tagged on to the end. And a picture of the girl, solemn-eyed and looking older than her twelve years, had replaced his also.

I closed the paper. The neighbourhood was hushed as only it can be on a beautiful Sunday morning. A bar of dusty sunlight was angled from kitchen window to floor; I walked through it on my way back to bed.

Later the New York *Times* and the "Sunday Morning Hour of Symphonic Gems" and the lingering smell of coffee; and then shattering it all the ringing of the telephone.

Ginny went to answer it. Cupping a hand over the mouthpiece, "It's for you, Paul."

I took the phone from her. ". . . Hello?"

"Is this you, Mr. Weiler?"

"That's right. Who is this?"

"I'm . . . I don't like to bother you, Mr. Weiler . . . but this is . . . I'm Stella Rockey. I'm Johnny's mother . . . Mr. Weiler? You there, Mr. Weiler?"

"I'm"—my eyes were squeezed shut—"I'm . . . on."

"Am I bothering you? You sound busy."

Realising how I was bent over and grimacing, and intensely aware of Ginny's eyes, I pulled myself erect. "No, I'm not busy."

"Honest, I don't like to bother you, Mr. Weiler, I know you're

busy, but I had to call, I just had to. I was gonna call you before when I first heard you'd seen my Johnny but I figured he'd show up. But he ain't showed up and I'm worried sick. . . . Mr. Weiler, what did he say to you? Can you tell me what he said to you?"

Trying to pick my words so very carefully, "Didn't the police . . . didn't they tell you?"

"They just said he asked you for money and that someone picked him up."

"That's all . . . that did happen."

"There wasn't nothing more, Mr. Weiler? He didn't say where he was going?"

". . . No."

"Do you think he was in trouble, Mr. Weiler? I can't imagine what he wanted the money for except he got in trouble with someone and owed him. He used to play cards with some fellows around here, but he never had much, I could never give him much . . . I—I just don't know. I'm almost sick with worry. I been havin' to take sleepin' pills and you know they ain't good for the ticker and I—I don't sleep anyway."

I risked a glance at Ginny. She was looking at the newspaper. "The police . . . don't they tell you what they think?"

"Oh, *them*! They been over here twice but only for a few minutes each time. I been callin' 'em though but this one lieutenant at the station house he don't like to answer the phone and I been speakin' to someone who don't know nothing. All he says is don't worry, they're workin' on it. Don't worry!"

"They haven't told you . . . anything?"

"Oh, one of 'em, I forgot his name, well he—— But before that, Mr. Weiler, I want to tell you somethin'. I know I can trust you and I want to talk frankly. Johnny, he once got in a little jam. He lifted some money once, this was about two years ago. It was some lady who was over the house and she left her purse behind and Johnny—well, we didn't have much and he just lifted some. But this woman she raised a terrible stink. They didn't do nothin' to Johnny, but I had to tell it to this one cop because he said everything could be important. I did," she ran on, "and he hinted maybe Johnny got himself into some kind of mess and had to hide out. He thinks maybe he's hidin' with someone. I—I just don't know. But there are a lot of roughnecks in this neighbourhood and maybe one of 'em got him in trouble. You know the truth, Mr. Weiler?" she said,

her voice starting to break after that nervous outpour. "I'm startin' to hope that's it and that he only left because he's worried about somethin' . . . because otherwise . . . otherwise maybe somethin' real bad happened to him. I—I don't care what he's done, just as long as he ain't dead or in some hospital somewhere. That's what I been thinkin' more'n more, that maybe he's dead and——" Sobs choked her and her chin went down against my chest and I swallowed hard.

"P-pardon me," she said. She blew her nose but it took a while before she could go on. "Mr. Weiler?"

"Yes . . . yes, I'm here."

"If the cops, if they thought he was dead, do you think they'd keep it a secret from me?"

"I . . ."

"I can't hear you, Mr. Weiler."

". . . I don't think they would."

"That makes me feel a little better. Well, I guess . . . I guess that's it, I bothered you enough. But if he calls you, Mr. Weiler, if Johnny calls you or tries to get in touch with you, you'll call me right away, won't you? . . . Don't you hear me?"

"Yes"—the floor seemed to be moving under me—"I'll call you."

"I keep thinkin' maybe I done somethin' to him that got him mad. You know how you quarrel sometimes and—— But I'm givin' you a tin ear, ain't I? But I got to talk to someone. Claire . . . I don't know what's with that girl, she's nice and all that but she keeps cuttin' me off and she says the more you talk about it the worse it is. But you got to talk. You didn't mind me talkin' to you, did you?"

". . . No."

"If I bothered you I'm awful sorry. I thought maybe you'd be over here to see Claire and I could talk to you then. You and Claire, you didn't have no quarrel, did you?"

My fingers squeezed the phone. "What . . . makes you say that?"

"Well, I asked Claire when you was comin' over and she acted like she didn't even hear, so I thought maybe——"

"No . . . it . . . I've just been busy, that's all."

"Then maybe we'll see you one of these days. . . . Oh, Lordy," she lamented, "I'm a wreck, I'm a nervous wreck. You won't even recognise me. . . . Oh, you never know when you have it good, do you?"

"All right," I said dully, not even knowing what I was saying.

"I'll say good-bye to you, Mr. Weiler."

"... Yes."

I hung on to the phone even after she'd clicked off. I set it slowly on the hook. Coming around, I sat at my desk, helpless against Ginny's eyes.

You and Claire, you didn't have no quarrel, did you? . .

"Who was it, Paul?" Ginny asked, frowning.

"No . . . one important."

"But you seem so upset."

"It wasn't anything . . . really."

"Don't you want to tell me?"

"Ginny, there's nothing to tell. Oh . . . it was just some woman . . . I did her by-line once and . . . she was telling me about some more trouble. I guess it did bother me." Lies, and I was so sick of lying!

"Well, I knew it was something. Can you do anything for her?"

"... No."

I asked Claire when you was comin' over and she acted like she didn't even hear. . . .

Ginny returned to her paper and now I was thinking of Claire Crisponi and how she certainly must sense that it was less than coincidence that John had vanished after visiting me; I thought of all the secrets which she held, and asked myself—for how long? I wondered how much she actually did suspect, if the police had spoken to her and what they'd asked and what she'd told them; or, if not yet, what she would say. Did she hate me now, and how far would that hatred take her? Or, not wanting to expose her relationship with John, would she remain silent?

So much, there was so very much I hungered to know.

And though I tried to reason against it, though I was aware of the danger involved, though even Claire Crisponi's name was a loathsome thing to me, I knew just the same that I had to get in touch with her.

I changed my mind many times that day but after dinner I went to a public phone several blocks away: I didn't want to go to Mr. Drews and have him see me make a call away from the apartment. I dialled the drugstore number near Claire's.

Yes, they would call Mrs. Crisponi. ("Hey, Sammy, you wanna make a nickel?")

... How would I put it, what would I say? Thinking of little else all day and still I didn't know.

Hollow voices in the other store and a street car rumbling by.

Then the sound of the phone booth closing.

Jaws clamped tight, unconsciously I shifted the receiver to my other hand.

"Hello," Claire said in a monotone. It came over: hullo. And with it came flooding back all the old ugly memories.

"How ... are you ... Claire?" Act friendly; like nothing has changed between you; like nothing ... like nothing at all is wrong. "... Claire?"

A hush. A vacuum. Then breaking through it cautiously, "Who's that?"

"This is ... Paul." No reply. "I ... called to ... see how you were. How are you, Claire?"

"So-so."

"You sound ... funny." Something I hadn't meant to say. And now I was cursing myself for calling.

"What do you want?"

"Can't I just ... call? Can't I just call to find out how you are?"

"I said I'm okay, didn't I?"

"Should I hang up?" Nothing in answer. "Claire ... what's the matter?" Why was I probing this way? Nothing was the matter. This was no special sullenness on her part; there was no shame, no embarrassment, not even anger: this was Claire Crisponi.

"Nothing's the matter. It's just hot in this booth."

"Then ... I won't keep you."

"Okay."

"... Claire." I probably caught her as she was about to hang up. Telling myself not to, "I— Did Mrs. Rockey tell you she called me?"

"No." But I felt she was lying.

"He— No one heard from him yet ... did they?"

"No."

"I guess ... you probably know he was over here, don't you? He wanted money for something, Claire. I don't know why he came to me, he just did. You don't know what he wanted money

for, do you?" So stupid! The way 'I was trying to convince her, it was suspicious itself. And actually did she even care? It was so hard to tell.

"How do I know?" she said.

"I just thought——" I was only getting more involved. "Claire, I want you to know . . . what happened that night . . . it doesn't make any—— What I'm trying to say is I hope we're still . . . friends. Claire?"

"Christ, I hear you."

". . . Don't you want to be . . . friends?"

"Look——"

"What were you going to say, Claire?"

"Nothing."

"You were going to say something."

"Look," she burst out then, "I just want to tell you I don't want any trouble. I been in enough trouble and I don't want no more. I got my own problems, I got my own headaches and I'm not looking for no one else's. Johnny's missing . . . I don't know anything . . . I don't want to know . . . I'm not looking for trouble. I just want to be left alone, understand?"

And I heard myself saying, "Yes." And maybe I said good-bye and maybe I didn't, but the receiver was hanging and I was standing in the steamy booth, knowing she knew, trying to push through the blur of my mind to figure out what to do; and then leaving the booth, an automaton, and walking outside to the fresh night air. There I stopped. What I had to do was call her back, bluff, ask her what she meant by that, insist that she tell me; maybe see her. Yes, see her. I had to see her. I started to re-enter the store, then halted again. No, I mustn't see her. What if—who knew?—what if I would kill her? Could I tell what I might do, if I might not be capable of killing again? This scared me.

. . . But just talk to her; at least that.

I went into the store and back to the phone booth. She'd probably left already and was on her way home. Maybe they would catch her. I started to dial, but just then a man with a bundle of newspapers on his shoulder came in the store and dropped it with a thud to the floor. I cradled the receiver and walked out.

John Rockey's story was still only a couple of paragraphs on the second page, but this time it stood alone. And this time there was a new angle.

Police revealed today that they are seeking for questioning a neighbour of John Rockey, 28-year-old paralytic who disappeared Thursday morning. . . .

No name was given to the suspect, nor a reason for the search. It gave me eerie mixed feelings; yet the one that lingered was relief.

I looked toward the phone booth. *I don't know anything . . . I don't want to know . . . I'm not looking for trouble.* The words now took on a reassuring flavour. I walked home.

When I woke the next morning I heard music and there was the smell of baking. I hadn't slept more than a few hours all night; tangled in my mind had been thought-twistings of Mrs. Rockey and Claire and what I would do if the unknown suspect were arrested and accused of the murder.

I put on my robe and rubbing my eyes went into the kitchen. There Ginny pointed to the stove in warning to step quietly.

"I'm trying the great experiment," she said. "If I ruin this cake, no more ever again. And, Paul," she said squeamishly, pulling at her fingers, "I don't think I used enough flour."

She let me kiss her, then she opened the oven and peered in. The radio was on low. I was tempted to search for news, but held off.

"Honey," she said, closing the oven, "what do you want for breakfast?"

"Juice. Coffee."

"Oh, no you don't. You're having eggs."

"You sound like your mother now," I managed to smile.

"I don't care what I sound like. I've got to put some weight on you. Don't you like my cooking any more?"

"I do."

"Say it like you mean it."

"I do." And I kissed her.

"Eggs?"

"Eggs. But first I want to get rid of this beard and take a shower."

"You yell out and I'll start them."

In the bath-room I took off my robe and lathered my face and shaved. Then I turned on the shower, adjusted it and stepped in. I let the water run hot first and then cold, bracing my shoulders against it.

"Paul?"

"Be right with you, hon."

The water ran down my back and I raised my arms.

"Paul?" She was outside the door now.

"What?" I called out.

"That man who disappeared, his name was Rockey, wasn't it?"

I shut off the water, clenching the handle. "... Why?"

"I think . . . Paul, I'm sure I heard over the radio he's dead."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

“PAUL, why didn’t you dry yourself? You’re still wet.”
“What did you hear?” I was trying to tie the cord to my robe. My feet were bare and water trickled to the rug.
“Just . . . well, I just think I heard he was dead.”
“What do you mean ‘you think’, ‘you think’?”
“Must you get so excited?” She looked hurt.
“Ginny, will you tell me?”

Well, she just wasn’t too certain, that was all. She’d been thinking about the cake and the news had gone on—it was still on, in fact—and as she’d opened the oven to take another look, she’d heard the name Rockey and it had come to her that something had been said about someone being dead; but by the time she’d perked up to listen, the commentator had moved to other news.

“But I just feel it’s this Rockey who——”

I swept past her. In the kitchen I dialled in other stations. Here and there I caught wisps of news programmes, but nothing about John Rockey. Impatiently I kept going back and forth until eventually all of them were over. Now the excruciating wait for station breaks. I remained bent over the set. Commercials. I was working the knob again, unmindful of Ginny’s presence. But no further news programmes. I clicked off the radio and for several seconds thought I wouldn’t be able to raise my head. When I did I felt the blood leaving it.

“Where are you going?”

I didn’t answer.

In the bedroom I dried myself hastily with my robe and pulled on some clothes. I wasn’t giving myself time to think. My shoe-laces gave me trouble and I would have left them hanging but Ginny came into the room then and I compelled my fingers to tie them. She looked at me without speaking, hurt still in her eyes. I said defensively, “My God, wouldn’t you be the same? I *knew* him! I just . . . saw him.”

A flicker of an apologetic smile. “You’re right and I’m sorry. I . . . didn’t think. I don’t know what makes me so touchy.”

"I'll be right back."

I went to Mr. Drews' but he'd sold out his morning papers and had no other editions. Leaving there, I ran the two blocks to the store where I'd called Claire. A couple of papers were in the rack. I drew one out. But instead of the headline I'd expected, the front page was free of the story. I flipped the page. And on the second, though prominently placed, was the unalarming head:

EX-CON HUNTED IN PARALYTIC'S DISAPPEARANCE

No mention of the body being found or of Rockey known to be dead; but rather this was merely an amplification of last evening's account. Here the police disclosed the suspect's identity: he was a forty-two-year-old waiter who had served time on a morals offence. A three-state alarm had been broadcast for the man, who was "known to have quarrelled with Rockey" the previous week and who had been missing from his rooming house since this past Saturday. The story also expanded on earlier ones, saying that Rockey had "sought a loan" the morning of his disappearance, but it did not mention my name or give further details.

A reference was made to photographs on the rear picture page. On that page were two pictures, one a snapshot of Rockey in front of his house, the other a rogues' gallery shot of the waiter, showing a man with putty-like features and long angular sideburns.

I closed the paper against my chest. While last night I'd had some conscience-squirmings for the suspect, now I felt only a great thankfulness for his existence.

I was looking at the story again as I left the store.

Of course . . . yes, it could be that the body had been found after this had gone to press; but maybe not. Wasn't it possible that Ginny had heard wrong? And actually . . . actually what had she even heard? Just disconnected words and a familiar name which she'd put together in sinister meaning. Perhaps all that had been said was that the police, hunting the waiter, were working on the theory that Rockey was dead. Or maybe . . . yes, maybe even that they felt that he wasn't dead. Either way. But hope remained; that was the point. Things were not as definite as before, as bleakly settled. And hope, too, lay in what

the story said about Rocky asking for a loan. Up until now that hadn't appeared and I'd worried if the police even believed it. But the printed words gave it credence and substance.

The newspaper went into a wire rubbish receptacle.

My hair was wet and uncombed and I ran it back with my fingers as I walked. I thought how wonderful it would be if this were just last Wednesday again. At the corner I stopped and checked the street: no cars near the house and I walked on. Oh, how I wished it were last Wednesday again!

As I opened the apartment door I searched for the blood flecks off the ceiling but couldn't find them right away and the exultation went through me: they're gone! But then they appeared one by one—no more than a few tiny dots against the grey paper, yet in my imagination they grew into quarters. I looked at the scabby line on my palm and made a fist.

"Is that you, Paul?"

"Yes."

She came out of the kitchen. "Was anything in the paper?"

"Not . . . what you heard."

"What did it say?" she frowned.

I told her about the waiter; I emphasised the waiter.

"Now I honestly don't know what I heard," she declared. "But there should be some news on in about five minutes." She glanced at her watch. "Maybe I just didn't hear right. That could be. You know me when I'm concentrating . . . Paul, meanwhile I've got something to show you."

"What?"

"Just you follow me."

She led me into the kitchen. On the table was a chocolate cake. Ginny beamed. "I don't know what it will taste like but it certainly looks like a cake, doesn't it? What do you think of your wife now?"

I nodded.

"Is that all you——" Then, "Paul, I'm sure I did hear wrong. I can almost swear to it now."

"I'm not only thinking of that," I countered quickly. "Look . . . I—I can't be worried about everyone. If he——"

"I know you're concerned about him," she said. "And it's only natural. I am too. I don't want anything to happen to him. I feel like I knew him also." She turned on the radio. "If there's anything, we'll hear it in a couple of minutes."

A soap opera ending. . . .

"I'll be back in a second." I went into the bathroom but left the door ajar. I didn't want to be near Ginny in the event the news I dreaded came over. I ran the water and washed my hands. My face was heated; my eyes in the mirror were blurry. The programme was over. I dried my hands but couldn't get them dry enough. Music, and now Ginny was tuning in other stations. I supported myself on the sink, arms rigid. News. My head went down and I drew in air between my teeth. International events: Korea; the U.N.; a strike in Italy. National: a senator had died; the polio rate had risen throughout the country; a forest fire in Maine; an additional steel allocation for the auto industry. Now for the local news: and John Rockey came first.

Ginny was calling me and I was holding on to the sink and trying to hear but not being able to for the hum in my head; and then Ginny's approaching footsteps and I pushed myself up and she was saying something and I followed her but could get no farther than the doorway to the kitchen. There the commentator's voice hit me like a furnace blast.

"... about ten A.M. this morning. The body, beaten almost beyond recognition, was buried in a shallow grave. Much of the dirt covering the body was washed away, apparently by Thursday night's heavy rainstorm. Rockey, who disappeared Thursday morning, was crippled in both legs and undoubtedly had no chance to defend himself against the murderer—a murderer whom police call one of the most fiendish in their experience. Inspector Andrew Murray, head of the Detective Bureau, described the slaying as, and I quote, vicious beyond belief, the work of a sadist, unquote. He would not comment upon the search now under way for an ex-convict who has been missing since the day before yesterday. All he would say was that no effort or time would be spared until the brutal crime was solved. Weirdly enough, Taberton Hollow was the scene of another murder. The body of James Peterson—"

He reviewed the crime of Peter Crisponi and I had to stand there and listen, chained by an awful helplessness to the doorway.

"... Meanwhile, in the north-east section of the city, a hunt of a different kind is in progress. The clothes-line burglar who has been causing so many red faces is—"

Ginny shut it off.

"... Paul, it's so horrible!"

Run!

"It's . . . it's such a terrible thing to have happen," she faltered. "To be murdered!"

The end, and now you've got to run!

Why couldn't I move?

"Paul, I-I'm actually sick from it."

I had to leave. Right away. The police would be here soon; they had to be. There'd be more questions, deeper questions, more involved questions, and I'd get mixed up. They'd search, they'd probe, they'd dig. They'd want to know about the cut on my hand and what happened to the shower curtain and where I was at what time and did I have an alibi. They'd see the blood on the ceiling and the sanded floor under the rug; they'd have Dr. Michaels' story about the noise he'd heard. And conjured up in my mind now, symbolic of everything I faced, was the image of Detective Ruppel; double-chinned and with his hands in his pockets.

"Paul, where are you going?"

Ginny's voice checked me as I headed stiff-legged toward the bedroom. I looked at her, so pretty even in her concern, eyes puzzled and forehead wrinkled. Yes, where was I going? Where was anything other than here?

"Darling, sit down. You're so pale."

"I'm . . . all right."

"I know, but you're upset."

"It's . . . just that . . . having seen him. That same morning." I'd made myself say that, and then it felt so wrong.

"I can just imagine how you feel. I know how shaky it's made me and I—I never even saw him. . . . Paul, why do you think he killed him?"

I almost said who. Then I remembered the waiter. It gave me a sickly feeling of relief.

"Who . . . knows?" I said. I kept walking. Almost hypnotised. The living-room, and there I sat down. Ginny sank next to me. The waiter and the three-state alarm. . . .

"Paul, didn't he give you any idea why he wanted the money?"

". . . No." I was looking straight ahead. Would they send out a three-state alarm unless . . . they really suspected him? Of course they wouldn't. And they had every reason for suspicion, what with the quarrel he'd had with Rockey, his prison record and now his disappearing. And this is why the police hadn't come here yet, even for further routine questioning. They were concentrating

on the waiter. They *believed* me. Even Ruppel. And probably even Lieutenant Thompson, who might not like me but certainly would not think of me as a murderer.

"Do you think it could have been blackmail or something like that?"

"You're asking . . . things I don't know." And maybe they'd never find the suspect. That way the case would just drift on and fade of itself. Or perhaps he was . . . dead. Could it be he was dead? After all, there was some reason why he hadn't returned to his rooming house. And if so, the investigation surely would die with him. Oh, let him be——

"Can I have one, Paul?"

I held out the pack and then took a cigarette for myself. I had to stay; I mustn't run away. There was still a chance and I must not lose my head. Flight would be like signing a confession; that was the absolute finish. Even if the police did come back—and they would, they had to be back no matter what happened with the waiter—and even if they suspected me, I still had the story of the broken lamp and I must stick to that.

"I got so excited when I heard his name," Ginny said, "I think I must have yelled at the top of my voice. I probably scared you, but—— Let me get it," she said as the phone rang.

But I was up first and I waved her away.

"Mr. Paul Weiler, please," said the operator. "New York calling."

And for an eerie moment Davenport was alive again.

"Mr. Weiler, please. This is New York."

". . . On the phone."

"One moment, please. Go ahead New York."

"Mr. Weiler?" A familiar voice but my mind was too foggy to place it.

"That's . . . right."

Ginny's lips were forming, "Is it for you?" and I nodded quickly and, to my relief, she left.

"How've you been, Weiler? This is Carl Amsterdam."

"Who?"

"Carl Amsterdam from *Dazzling Detective*."

He knew, Amsterdam was saying, how close I'd been with "poor Davenport", but now that the "old man" was gone he thought I might be interested in a new connection. He wanted me to cover the state for him—"give me first look-see at every yarn"—and he was sure that he'd be able to match Davenport's

rate even though it undoubtedly was higher than *Dazzling* usually paid.

"But I'm after the best names and I'm willing to up my rate to get them. I know the calibre of your work and I know I can depend on you. So what do you say?"

"Let me"—I could just about hold the phone—"would you let me think it over?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to know soon though. I don't have to tell you what this racket's like. You know the competition. . . . Look, if you're interested, I'll tell you where we might begin."

He'd just got a call from a writer in this city who wanted a "filing"—the assignment—on a new case. But Amsterdam had put him off until he could speak with me.

"Some guy named Rockey was knocked off. From what I hear, he was found a couple hours ago all beat to hell. He's supposed to have been missing a few days. You been following it?"

". . . No." This too? What more? What else? I wanted to set the receiver on the hook but knew vaguely that I mustn't.

"Did you say yes?"

"I . . . said I haven't."

"It looks real schmaltsy from here and I understand the cops are looking for some pervert he had a fight with. It sounds like it's got all the angles and it's probably going to bust open any minute. So if you are interested in a deal, I'd like to start off with this one. You want to follow it up for me?"

I shook my head.

"Hello?" he said.

". . . Hello."

"Say, what's wrong with this connection? You keep fading off. I asked you if you wanted to look into it for me."

". . . All right." I said it because, emotionally spent, it was the easier way and I wouldn't have to go into an explanation; also because suddenly it seemed like the less suspicious way.

"Great! Wire me collect the moment they nab that guy, won't you? I'd like to get it in the works as fast as I can. And you know how I like 'em. Plenty of zip and sensation and don't spare the clues and suspects. And build up the cripple part. This can be a real tear jerker. If there's any sex throw it in. Not too heavy where we'll have the church and post office after us, but enough so that every Mary Hassenfuss gets the idea. This is the kind of case we can really go to town on. As for word rate, don't you worry about that. I'm going to treat you right. Okay?"

"All right."

"I'll expect to hear from you soon then."

I hung up and didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Damn it to hell, it was funny, wasn't it? I wished I could tell someone and burst out laughing . . . only I was sure I'd break into tears right after. Don't spare the sensation and build up the cripple angle and make it a tear jerker and toss in the sex; and each word makes you three, maybe three and a half cents richer. Oh, I could go to town on this one all right! And the by-line would be "Paul Weiler, Murderer." Oh, if there's a God in heaven, You have a sense of humour!

I walked to the window and stood there a long time, wondering why I hadn't heard from the police or if by some miracle they would let me alone, if I were making a mistake by waiting, by doing nothing, or if I should just pack up and leave with Ginny and try to find some place where we could make a life for ourselves and——

But what could I tell her?

I wished I could fall at her feet and tell her what I ached to say: that I had killed a man; tell that I'd killed a man, and beg her forgiveness.

The street was empty. Almost too empty. And my loneliness was a stifling thing.

The friendly clink of dishes in the kitchen, and I went there.

Ginny had decided to make an icing and was stirring it on the stove and examining it critically. "I won't be happy until I ruin the cake," she said. She sniffed the chocolate icing on her knife and made a bitter face.

I came closer, *Ginny*, I wanted to say, *listen to me and try not to hate me.*

If I had killed a man for money, I could have said that; if I had slain for revenge or for gain or for a dozen other reasons, I would have been able to speak up. But within my crime was another crime—that of Claire Grisponi, and this I could not bring myself to reveal.

"Paul," she gasped, coming around, "you haven't had breakfast yet! I forgot all about it in the excitement."

"It's . . . okay."

"Well it's not okay with me. And it's even time for lunch. . . . Oh, gosh, and I spilled out the coffee! I'll make some. Paul, see if we have any bread there, please? And this icing . . . right in the middle . . . what a head I have!" She was stirring it faster

now, looking at me as I opened the bread-box. "Anything there?"

"A couple of slices."

"We'll need more than that. Do you want to do me a favour? Would you go to the grocery and— You feel like?" she asked with a slow anticipatory shake of her head.

"I'll go." I wanted to see a paper anyway.

"Then get me a loaf. A sliced loaf. And I'll need something for lunch also. Get some American cheese . . . a quarter of a pound, I imagine . . . and some ham and— What else?" She drew in her lower lip as she kept stirring. "Soda, if you want. Maybe a carton of cokes. By the time you get back I'll have the coffee on and the eggs. If I ever get myself straightened out here, that is."

I turned to go. But stopped at the doorway. I looked at her, busy over the stove and a little confused. She glanced up and with her arm brushed at her bangs. She gestured for me to hurry.

I went to Mr. Drews' first. He still hadn't received any later editions. They were late, he said; should have been here long ago. I told him I'd be back and I walked a few stores down, to the grocery, where I got Ginny's order. Back at Mr. Drews', I set the package on the counter. I asked for a carry-all of cokes and he wanted to know if they had to be cold and I said a couple and he took two from the refrigerator, wiped them off with a rag and put them in the container. He looked at his wrist-watch, compared times with the clock near the pay-phones and said he didn't know what the devil was keeping the papers.

"You're Fred Craig, too, aren't you, Paul?" he asked.

"Yes." I was staring at the door, waiting for it to open.

"I thought so but I wasn't sure. You got one in the latest *Squadcar*, you know."

"I . . . haven't seen it."

"Can't keep up with 'em, huh? How many's the most you had in one issue?"

". . . Three." I was thinking maybe to call Ginny and tell her I'd be a few minutes late.

"You know what I'd do if I were you, Paul? You don't have anything keeping you in one place. I'd pack up my portable and take the wife some place like the Riviera—that's in France, isn't it?—I'd go there and work in the sun. You could write up French murders as well as any other kind, couldn't you? I mean it, that's what I'd do. Ever think of it?"

". . . Yes."

"Of course I don't want to lose you, but I'm just saying. What the devil do you have to stay put for? Especially in this city. Maybe you don't like to travel, I don't know, but me"—his elbows were on the counter and his eyes became dreamy—"if I had your set-up I'd go different places and maybe buy me a boat— But things always look greener on the other side of the fence, don't they?" He rose and wiped his hands on his apron. "Me, I don't know what made me get into this business. No brains, I guess. It's slavery. Eight in the morning until midnight, standing on your feet, not even having time to go upstairs and look at television. I don't know why I even bought it. This business has only done one thing for me." He showed me a strong right forearm and wrist. "That's from scooping out ice-cream."

He went on about his problems, about kids who tilted the pin-ball machine and wanted slugs or who hung around half the night, leaning against the window and chalking the sidewalk and tossing balls against the wall and who occasionally did you a favour by buying a soda while they read all your magazines. But you had to be nice to them or—oh, here come the papers now.

I walked forward as the door swung open. The papers dropped to the floor; they were bound with twine. I could see a fragment of a large black headline as Mr. Drews bent over and snipped at the cord with a scissors. He handed me one.

The crime was headlined and it screamed across three-quarters of the front page. There was a picture of John Rockey and one of Lieutenant Thompson and two other detectives standing at the grave, and Thompson was pointing to the ground. The whole thing sent a fresh shiver scudding through me.

WOODLAND GRAVE YIELDS BLUDGEON VICTIM

Taberton Hollow Reveals Cripple's Savage Murder

Victim of a murderer's fury, the horribly beaten body of John Rockey, 28, of 3467 Gorman Street, was found early today in a crudely dug grave in Taberton Hollow, a stretch of lonely woodland in the south-east section of the city. He had been missing since Thursday.

According to veteran police officials, the crime has few equals in savagery. The face of the victim was smashed to a pulp, his hands were clenched as though in agony. There is a possibility, police say, that he was tortured before death.

Rockey, a friendly, likeable youth, had been crippled in

both legs since birth. His 'crutches, without which he could not get around, were not found at the scene, providing police with a double mystery.

"From the brutality of the assault," commented Lt. Alvin Thompson, Homicide chief, "Rockey was murdered by a madman or an inhuman fiend. I am anxiously awaiting the results of the post-mortem. It should tell us much."

The story ran over to a back page. There it told how two boys, brothers, had led to the discovery of the body. While playing in the lane yesterday afternoon, they'd found John Rocky's wallet (*Why hadn't I gone in there, why hadn't I looked?*) which they'd turned over to their father that night. The father, recalling Rocky's name from the papers, gave the wallet to the police early this morning. A search of the area had then brought them to the storm-uncovered body. The story also told how the hunt for the missing waiter had been intensified; it mentioned Rocky's seeking a loan—still without revealing my name; and then it went back to relate in brief how Taberton Hollow had been the scene of the Peterson murder.

On the front page, where I turned again, was a small boxed story which I had overlooked before and which was tucked under the two-column lead paragraph of the main story.

MACHINE-GUN SQUAD TO PATROL ENTIRE CITY

Shortly following the discovery of the body of John Rocky, Commissioner of Police Henry J. Shadway announced the formation of a special squad of detectives, armed with tommy-guns, who will patrol the city nightly. Their orders are to shoot to kill.

"While we must not allow ourselves to become panicked," he said, "we must take every precaution. I cannot say if Rocky's murderer is behind the city's recent wave of muggings, assaults and armed robberies, but we are taking no chances. There is no doubt in my mind that the fiend behind the murder of that innocent and helpless young man will not hesitate to kill again, and I ask every citizen to be on the alert. We are searching for a brutal and desperate man."

With agitated fingers I folded the paper. I put it on one of the fountain stools. The picture refused to become real. Was I the terror who held the city in fear, the fiend, the brute against whom armed men were to prowl the streets at night? Mr. Drews, behind the counter again, was smiling at me and dismally I wondered if he would smile or even remain there if he knew. Probably this good friend of mine would run for his gun or yell for the police. Right now I was still Paul Weiler to him, that bright young man with the pretty little wife. To him I had not changed as yet; to him I was still not a murderer and he could smile and be at ease. I lifted my packages. I walked out of the store but got only to the kerb. There I stopped and took a step back, a tremendous heat scalding my body.

Three automobiles were parked in front of the house. Two were squad cars. One was a dark sedan—a detectives' car. Several uniformed patrolmen stood outside, looking up at the windows of the apartment. Near them were a handful of children and a few neighbours, all of them gawking.

I thought of Ginny in there and what the police were saying to her and how she must be telling them that I'd be right back, that surely everything would be straightened out with my return. I wanted to hurry to her; but all my resolution of before dissolved into panic. These were not officers there to question me; they were a hunting party. And the neighbours, all the neighbours . . .

"Wonder what the excitement is?"

Mr. Drews was standing behind me. He walked down the street, untying his apron. I backed away. I walked from the corner and doing so knew I was leaving everything behind—wife, home and parents, friends and society and warmth; good-bye all. Walked I knew not where, into a void that seemed terribly cold and bewildering and frightening; walked out of the world I had always known. I put the packages on the sidewalk. I began to run.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I RAN for blocks, along many streets. I ran until I could go no farther and then rested against a lamp-post, racked by gasps and wishing for death; but after a few moments I was off again, first walking, then lengthening my steps until I was running, one hand pressed against my right side where it had begun to cut me.

A bus was lumbering toward the corner and I waved it to stop. Inside, the driver waited impatiently as I stood there, puffing and partly bent and still holding my side. Everyone was looking at me as I reached into my pocket for change. Grasping the backs of seats to keep from falling, I walked unsteadily to the rear.

I slumped on to a seat, breathing sibilantly. For a time I was able to keep from thinking but then, as my breath came easier, there was a tumbling onrush of thought. My brain churned with pictures of detectives tramping through the apartment, pulling open drawers and closets and throwing back rugs; of Ginny crying and attempting to answer questions, of neighbours hugging the front door and whispering among themselves, and of kids running along the street toward the house; of more police cars and Dr. Michaels coming up and wanting to know what was the matter and the shock on his face and, yes, he had heard a loud noise that day and I certainly had acted strange and—yes, that cut on my hand; and of newsmen with their pads, waiting for statements and poking around, and flashbulbs going off. . . .

The bus was old and creaky. It rocked from side to side and I sat, body swaying and damp hands fastened on my lap. I had never taken this bus before and had no idea where it was going and didn't particularly care. All I knew was that I was going somewhere, and for a time that was enough. There were moments when I was even able to lose the feeling of being pursued: the creaking bus with its gently swaying passengers dimmed the urgency of flight. But as one by one these people were getting off, it hit me with renewed intensity how

they were going to homes and friends, while I was going—where?

Behind me, all around me, the hum of the machinery to track me down. Didn't these people hear?

Teletype messages. Police broadcasts. *Six-one; about one hundred seventy pounds, brown wavy hair, last seen wearing a tan sports jacket, brown slacks, white sports shirt. . .*

And squad cars roaming the streets and detectives racing to nip off train stations, bus terminals, airports.

I needed a plan. Soon my picture and description would be in every newspaper, and then it would be too late: every person would be a policeman. Now maybe there was still time; at least I had some freedom of movement yet. But where could I go? Perhaps to a hotel. No, they'd check hotels; probably one of the first things they'd do. A rooming-house? But how long could I remain in hiding? Most likely only until the next edition of the paper. Where else? . . . Damn it, *where else?*

. . . The city was shrinking for me.

I had to get out of town. I had to go some place where I'd be safe for at least a little while, where I could relax and think things out.

A check of my wallet: fourteen dollars. And the change in my pocket. Fourteen dollars and seventy-two cents and the clothes I was wearing: my only possessions.

I was sitting on a corner of the seat, trying to make myself get up. I hated to leave the security of the bus, to step back into the world again.

Pulling the signal cord above me, I stood up. I walked to the rear door. The bus stopped but the door did not open and I looked apprehensively at the driver.

"You gotta step down, buddy," he called back with mock politeness, twisting around in his seat.

I was on the sidewalk now and the bus was pulling away. Where was I? I didn't know. The street signs at this particular intersection were not in their frames. I was lost; hunted and lost. I began to walk quickly, first in one direction then the other, unable even to make a simple decision. Then I ran to the next corner. My calves hurt and my lungs were on fire. A single street sign: the intersecting one was missing. This was Baldwin Street and nowhere. I went another block, though I couldn't run any more. This was the corner of Baldwin and Hammerton. I tried to locate myself in the city: it seemed I should know, that I'd

been around here before. I fought to penetrate my brain's fuzziness. Wasn't . . . yes, wasn't the Dawson Highway near here? That's right. About a mile. I'd go there and hitch a ride and—but did I have time? I might wait hours for a ride, and surely there'd be squad cars passing by. Maybe road blocks had even been set up. And anyway I didn't even know in which direction the highway was.

The train and bus stations were back in the centre of town.

Unconsciously I ripped off a piece of nail with my teeth.

Maybe they weren't under surveillance yet. Should I take the chance?

I had to take the chance. There was no other way.

I hurried back to the bus-stop, crossed the street and waited there for the down-town bus. I kept pacing up and down, stepping now and then out to the middle of the street. No sign of a bus. I started walking, realising I wasn't saving time but unable to remain still.

Minutes later I saw a cab stop for a red light. I raced for it, shouting. The light changed and the cab started to pull away but stopped. I jumped in. The driver asked in an easy voice where to and I said the railway station. The light was red again and he was filling in his record sheet. He was still writing even after the light turned once more. I leaned forward and told him I was in a hurry. And regretted it immediately. This was the kind of thing that would be remembered.

It was about a ten-minute ride and I had the driver let me off a block from the station because I didn't want to get out at the main entrance. I couldn't give him a tip because I needed every cent.

"Thanks, sport," he called after me. And this too would be recalled.

Approaching the station I looked for police cars and then, head lowered, trotted up the steps. But the first level of the station was little more than a passage-way between shops and I took an escalator to the main floor. The ticket windows were on one side of the waiting-room; benches fronted them. I slipped into a phone booth and, pretending to be talking, peered around. The waiting-room was fairly crowded and I searched for faces I might have seen at Headquarters or in some station house. I saw none. Then I tried to pick out those men who might be detectives, those who wore hats and had that certain indefinable

look. There were several, but no one who appeared to be especially on the alert or watching windows. But it was impossible to tell for sure.

It was six minutes past two by the big clock over the candy kiosk. Probably the next train out would be at half-past.

The line in front of one of the windows had dissolved.

I grasped the handle of the door. I began to pull back on it but then shoved it forward again. The ten or so yards between the booth and the window loomed like a hundred. But I mustn't wait too much longer: if the police weren't here already they would be soon. I opened the door and stepped out. Blind to all faces around me, I strode forward. A woman reached the window ahead of me and I wanted to grab her and pull her away. She rested her arms on the ledge and asked about parlour cars to Philadelphia and the ticket agent had to look it up. I glanced at the other lines but they were longer. Any second I expected a hand on my shoulder. I had to hold my stomach in.

Whatever happens will happen.

But I would fight. I told myself I would fight. If they grabbed me I would swing until I lost consciousness, until I collapsed and would not know how they dragged me out.

"Where's it to, mister?"

I looked up. The woman had gone.

The ticket agent's eyes repeated the question. I had not even thought where to go. I wanted to say: the first train anywhere. I couldn't even think of a town, a city. Then I remembered Philadelphia and I said that.

As he started to pull out tickets from the slot I asked him when the next train would leave and he said on the hour. My mind was stumbling and I said how about New York and he replied that there'd be a train out at two-thirty.

"Make it . . . New York. Please." Regardless of what he thought, I couldn't care.

"Round trip?" He was eying me peculiarly.

". . . One way."

He drew out a ticket and stamped it hard and slid it to me. It cost seven dollars and some change. That left me less than six dollars. I was sure the man was watching me as I left.

Outside the waiting-room a small group of people was gathered before the closed gate to the New York train. I asked a porter when it would open and he said in about fifteen minutes. I went into the lavatory and lingered there until I finished two

cigarettes: I was worried that perhaps the ticket agent, suspicious of my actions, had contacted the police. They did that sometimes, I knew; and sometimes too the police alerted all ticket agents as to a description even before they themselves arrived to take over. Walking out, I looked in every direction. No officer I could recognise. I bought a newspaper—it was the same edition I'd seen—and held it just below eye level while I made another careful survey. In this way I headed toward the large crowd that had formed by now in front of the gate. The train still hadn't taken on passengers. Bringing down the paper I worked my way toward the centre. I was taller than most and I hunched over as much as possible, chin flattened. Every few seconds I glanced at my watch. It was lined with sweat.

"Your attention, please," boomed a voice from the loud-speaker. "The New York Express will be leaving on Track Four. . . ."

And now the gate was sliding open.

The crowd squeezed forward. It moved by degrees for only a couple of people could get through the entrance at a time. An erotic sensation flooded my thighs and belly. It was a glow of pain and pleasure and yet was neither. I thought: good-bye, Ginny, good-bye, my darling. Then: I'll find a way; let me on this train and I'll find a way. I tried to press on.

"Take it easy, buddy, you'll get there."

This brought my head up sharply. The man in front was glowering. He looked away, the blood rising in his neck. I had trod on his foot.

". . . The New York Express now leaving on Track Four. . . ."

The man ahead was taking his time. He set down his suit-case once, adjusted the golf bag on his shoulder and flexed his arms. He sauntered from side to side like he was purposely trying to delay me. I attempted to get around him but as I did the profile of a figure standing to one side of the gate stopped me as though impaled. It was a man I had never seen before and yet I had seen him countless times: his hat tilted up from his forehead, a hand stroking his chin as with a deceiving casualness he studied each person who passed, he looked like half the detectives I had ever known.

I stood there, heart rocketing against my ribs, an island in the crowd.

Part of me was crying out to go forward, to take my chance, that it had to be now or never again, urging me on with the

teasing hope that perhaps he wasn't a detective but just waiting for a friend; but another part was needling me to flee. I could do neither. Soon only a scattering of people remained and these were disappearing through the gate, doubly and singly, passing like sheep before the man's eyes. Within the fire of my brain was the realisation that I had to make my move now, that in a matter of seconds he would turn around; yet still I was held fast. Then only three or four people were left and they too were dribbling off.

It was as though I were alone on a stage with every spotlight focused upon me.

I began to walk away.

Through all that vastness I walked, one careful step at a time, holding myself back, not sure I could control my own body, walking and waiting for an outcry, for the slap of footsteps behind. Maybe he was signalling someone; maybe I was being surrounded; it could happen here or at any point or even outside—many men drawing in on me. But I knew I must walk slowly, just walk, not run.

I reached the waiting-room and crossed it and kept on. Near the escalator I joined a group of people and here it became harder to hold back but I did. Each hair seemed to have a pulse of its own. My shirt clung sweatily to my flesh. The escalator ride was a torture; I felt I was hung high for everyone to see. About half-way up, against my will I began to take extra steps; and once my control was riven it shattered all the way and at the top I began to run. I ran down the length of the corridor with all its hollow noises and out to the sidewalk, stopping to look to each side, and then walked to my right, thinking I should have gone left, and kept on, shooting back glances every so often. Once I thought I saw a familiar hat and I started to run again, cutting down a side street and then up another and then along still another. My lungs were bursting, my legs wobbly. I entered a cigar store and went directly into a phone booth and flopped on the seat, taking sharp agonising breaths. I stayed there about five minutes and would have remained longer but a woman was waiting outside: she would look in occasionally with vexed eyes. I got up and went out to the sidewalk. My legs barely could hold me. The people who passed, I am sure, did not even notice me and yet I felt naked before them. I walked on, groping against the walls of my brain, against the walls of the city.

At the kerb I waited to cross the street. Automobiles swished past. It was dizzying. I stepped back, afraid otherwise I might fall, but as I did I thought: why? Death became a lovely lady. I moved closer to the kerb and felt my eyes widen. I was playing a game of suicide, selecting a certain car in the distance and watching it approach and zoom by me. It looked so easy; and as each car went by I thought: that could have been it: the whole thing over. I was trying to hypnotise myself so that I could fall forward unconsciously. I saw a moving van turn into the street a few blocks up and kept my eyes on its headlights and didn't think of death but sleep, and as it rolled nearer on its giant wheels I knew, swaying, that I had to get my head under one of them, that it must be sure; and then everything was lost in the explosions of my heart. But at the last second I drew away and the van swept past with a current of air and I was sorry and glad at the same time: sorry because I knew I could never do it, that the way out of suicide was closed to me also; glad because I did not want to be dead on the street.

I crossed over. There were hunger rumblings in my stomach to remind me that I was still a living thing.

All around me were the rush and glory of life: gay store windows and vendors selling soft pretzels and an old woman hawking shopping bags and children holding on to their mothers and a dog sniffing at the sidewalk and a sound truck blaring music and riggers hauling a safe to a third-floor window. And then, through it all, a black and white squad car with a loudspeaker attached to it.

It was heading this way.

Like twin cameos I could see clearly the two officers in front. The driver was looking directly at me.

Edging away from the kerb I faced a store window, jaws clamped tight. Soon the reflection of the squad car glided on to the glass. It inched along. The officer next to the driver was gazing my way. I thought of my sports jacket and slacks combination and felt myself cringe. Why hadn't I taken off my jacket? But the car was moving past. I risked a look after it. The police car, one of many autos in a line, was disappearing around the corner.

Carrying my jacket over my arm now, I walked fast, not sure if I had been recognised, if they were coming around to nab me by surprise. I angled across the street and went down another and swung through the door of a department store. I cut across

the store and came out the other side. I walked about half a block before I saw a second squad car. This one was parked and a patrolman was standing next to it. I back-tracked.

A drag-net? How often had I written that word! A good word, a sure-fire word that had always meant a few pennies to me. But now it stood for armed men at every corner and squad cars at each intersection and others touring street after street, shifted like so many chess pieces by dispatchers at Headquarters.

But perhaps . . . could it be? . . . perhaps I was wrong, maybe I wasn't in a trap after all. There always were cops around here; you always saw squad cars. It was just that I was scared and was magnifying everything and— Yet even so, wouldn't they throw a cordon around the area when the papers came out . . . with my name, my description . . . possibly my picture? Too many people could place me in this vicinity: the ticket taker; the cab driver; anyone I had passed on the run.

Two trolleys passed, heading in opposite directions. I wished I were on either of them.

If I could get to one of the suburban stations, possibly I could catch a train there; maybe *they* wouldn't be covered. Or perhaps steal a car: I wondered if I had nerve enough for this, and then how you went about it. But first things first. Just get out of here. It had been stupid to come back to the centre of town. I should have realised that there would be the greatest concentration of police here, especially since home was not too far away.

. . . Home?

Were the police still there and where was Ginny and who was with her?

A third trolley was rumbling in the distance.

The squad car with the patrolman standing next to it was still parked on the corner to my right. I started the other way but there in the centre of the street was a traffic officer, his back to me. The trolley had stopped for a light two streets down. I would have to catch it on one of these corners, and both were dangerous. Every place was dangerous. Deciding to risk the traffic officer rather than the squad car men, I strolled to my left as casually as I could, waiting for the trolley to come closer. It had started up and was now thundering on to this block. I raced into the street and to the traffic island there, where several people were waiting. The officer was only a few feet away; he hadn't turned as yet. The trolley came to a grinding halt and the doors swung open. I had to wait for the others and, trying to

inch forward, kept shifting from leg to leg. I climbed up, but then, almost as soon as I did, even as the doors were closing behind, came a sound that reverberated through me: the shrill cold blast of a police whistle.

I gripped the iron railing which formed a semi-circle around the motorman and was too stunned to look back and knew only that the car wasn't starting; and then the motorman leaned over for the handle and opened the doors again and this time I did look and in the broad sweep of my gaze saw the officer on the street in front of the trolley, his back still to it, arms flying to guide on traffic, while coming through the doors now was a young woman with many bundles. The whistle blew again and shortly afterwards the trolley lurched forward, almost throwing me off balance as I manoeuvred myself to the back of the car.

Taking one of the side seats I sat with my back to the window, facing those across the aisle, wondering how I could go on: the old questions, and yet somehow going on, wanting to go on. We had to stop at the next corner, the one where the squad car was parked, and I saw the head and shoulders of the patrolman next to it. Then the trolley jolted on. For blocks it halted at almost every intersection to take on passengers until eventually all the seats and even the aisle space were filled. Two men clutched the straps above me, their bodies forming a comforting shelter. The trolley took many turns; I did not look to see where we were. Just that we were moving, that we were leaving the centre city behind, was sufficient. Soon the trolley was gliding smoothly with only a few stops. I was so tired that I couldn't hold up my head and I let it roll forward and closed my eyes, but the blood was rushing through me so hard and fast that I did not think it possible to sleep. I did sink into a half-sleep, however, though I didn't realise it until the clanging of the trolley bell snapped me fully awake. The car had stopped. Though the aisle had emptied, most of the seats were still occupied.

The motorman kept clanging the bell, then opened the doors and shouted out what was the matter and someone yelled that the truck was stalled. Move 'er over, he called back. Can't, came the reply, she's stalled and they can't push it and anyway there are cars on either side, but they had called a tow-truck and it should be here . . . well, it should be here some time. And the motorman, muttering in disgust, checked his watch on its black leather cord and then stepped out.

We were in the heart of the city's produce, fish and poultry district, close to the river front. Trucks were loading and unloading on every side. The motorman came back after some time. He said this was going to take a good while, folks, and whoever wanted a transfer for the Fifty over on Hedge Street could have one, and a few people took them, though I didn't, and afterwards the motorman left again, carrying his coin-box. It was then I decided I wanted a transfer too, a transfer to anywhere, and I walked off to get the motorman but he was talking to the motorman of the car that had stopped behind us. The truck that blocked us had its hood up but no one was tinkering with it. A third trolley squealed into line.

I went over and got a transfer and asked the motorman where the Fifty took you, but when I walked away I still wasn't sure I knew. I stopped, trying to think whether to hop back on or go over to Hedge Street. My stomach gurgled emptily. I sauntered across the sidewalk, still not sure what to do, and had to go out to the street to pass a couple of trucks parked against loading platforms. One of them had Virginia tags. The driver was in the cab, door open and legs on the running board, laboriously jotting figures on a piece of paper. He needed a shave, his short sleeves had been cut off at the shoulders, revealing tattoos, and his cap was fringed with an assortment of buttons. A sudden hope was rising in me. Maybe he would give me a ride.

I stood near the cab, looking at him, wondering how to ask, how to put it so as not to be suspicious. He was too busy to notice me and I couldn't make myself speak up. I scraped my shoe over a piece of gravel and he lifted his eyes, only to bring them down almost immediately.

"... Could I ask you ... something?"

He glanced up again. His eyebrows were thick and black. Another pencil jutted through loops across the peak of his cap.

"Are you ... would you be going back to Virginia ... soon?"

He nodded but his eyes said: so what?

"Would you ... do you mind ... could I go with you?"

He shook his head abruptly and looked down. He wet the tip of his pencil on his tongue.

"... I'll pay you."

He began to write, ignoring me. Once he muttered to himself, "Ah, shoot!" and made quick erasures and I felt he was blaming it on my presence.

"I'll . . . even pay you now." This, almost a half-minute later and his head came up slowly and his eyes gathered me in and I knew I had sounded too urgent.

"Mac," he drawled, "Ah'm mo' expensive'n a train." He kept looking at me and only after many seconds did he lower his head once more. I walked away, wiping my palms along my pants, certain the man was watching, certain I had given myself away.

Crossing the street I strode back to the line of trolleys. The truck still blocked it. A fourth trolley had joined the column. I walked up a side street which the trolleys in turn blocked. Glancing back occasionally to make sure the cars were still there, I searched for out-of-state trucks. There were several. I went up to a driver from Pennsylvania but he said he wasn't leaving until to-morrow, which I was sure was a lie, and then to another who told me the company had a rule against riders and he pointed to a sign on the windshield to prove it. This almost cost me my nerve but I decided to keep trying. I headed for a New Jersey truck that was half-parked on the sidewalk in front of Pearson's Dressed Poultry, Inc., so that it was tilted slightly to one side. Three men were unloading crates of chickens whose heads, combs and wattles fluttering, poked inquisitively through the slats. The stench was repellent but the birds, except for low deep-throated sounds, were oddly quiet. A cigar-chewing middle-aged man in striped overalls was on the tailboard easing the crates down to two Negroes who slid them along the sidewalk to the wall. No matter where I placed myself, I was always getting in their way.

"Do something for you, son?" the man in the overalls asked eventually, rocking a crate to the edge of the tailboard.

"I was wondering could you . . . would you give me a lift to Jersey?"

"Where"—he was working the crate forward and his voice was strained—"you going?"

"Newark." The first Jersey city I could think of. And I had to wait for his answer until the crate came down and then until he blew his nose and wiped it.

"I'm going just outside Vineland myself." He was stuffing the handkerchief into a back pocket.

". . . Would you . . . take me?"

"Don't usually like to do it." He scratched his neck. "Get into an accident and you get yourself all kinds of trouble."

"... Please? I-I'm stranded here."

He was studying me now, looking at my face, my clothes, his gaze travelling down to my shoes and then up again. After a long moment, "Okay," and a quick nod.

"Are you leaving soon?"

"About a half-hour, I'd say. Maybe a little more."

"Can I wait in the cab?"

"If you want."

I started off and then, remembering, "Thanks, mister. Thank you . . . very much," and he simply shrugged.

It was a shabby truck. The seat coverings were worn so that bits of stuffing puffed through and the windows were grey with dust and the smell of poultry hung everywhere. I was afraid even to consider myself lucky lest the thought itself make something go wrong. I smoked my last cigarette. Time crawled by; the hands of my watch seemed reluctant to move on. My stomach kept growling, protesting with loud bubbly noises at my not having eaten. A luncheonette sign hung on the corner of the next block. It was tempting but I didn't want to leave the truck for fear it would go without me. But I felt weak and I was getting a headache too. A cup of coffee was what I needed; at least that. It would give me strength and hold me until we were out of the city. I climbed out of the truck.

"Mister, would I have time to get a cup of coffee over there?"

"Sure. We got a while yet."

"... You won't leave without me, will you?"

"I'll be here." His back was to me; he was shifting out another crate.

"I'll . . . be right back."

I trotted up the street to the luncheonette. A few men were at the counter and I sat at the far end. A woman was pouring steaming water into the top of the coffee urn. Finished, she wiped the counter in front of one of the men and took his order and ladled out soup. Then she filled a glass with water and brought it over to me. I wanted a sandwich but hated to dig too deep into my money and so asked only for coffee.

"Cream?"

"Please." She set down a small bottle that slopped over. "I'll have a piece of that cake, too." I couldn't resist.

"It's yesterday's?" She put it like a question.

"That's all right."

She lifted off the plastic top of the container and cut the cello-

phane-wrapped coffee cake into segments. Chewing on a piece I went to the door and looked out. The truck was still there but the trolleys had gone.

"Honey, that's the way you get ulcers," the woman said when I came back. "You got to learn how to relax. This world's going to be here a long time after you're gone. And, my God, that frown! If you're frowning now, honey, wait'll you see my age and got things to frown about."

I didn't like the way she had drawn attention to me, for a couple of men were leaning over and grinning. Then one of them said, "Hey, Millie, how old are you anyway?"

"Old enough to know better, doll," she answered, pouring my coffee, "and young enough not to care."

Everyone laughed and another man came in and sat a stool away from me and he wanted to know what the joke was and then he said Millie when are you going to give me a break and, winking, she said honey you won't live that long and he said what's wrong with me and she said honey how much time you got to listen; but meanwhile, amid the laughter, with the coffee in front of me, I was staring at a folded newspaper jutting out of this man's jacket pocket. I could see only a fragment of a headline: MYSTERY WR, but it was enough. Mystery Writer. Me. It was already on the street. My name was out. I lifted the cup, for something outside myself told me I had to have nourishment, that my body was a thing that still lived and had to be attended to, but the cup was even too hot to hold and I had to put it down and wait, thinking I ought to leave, I must leave, and then tried again and the cup was still hot but I took several swallows, burning my mouth and throat, and then, not quite finished, drank some water and stood up. I left a half-dollar on the counter because Millie was busy and I couldn't wait for change.

They were still unloading the truck.

"About fifteen more minutes, son," the man on the tailboard said.

I started to re-enter the cab but my thoughts were on what the papers were saying and an anxious curiosity was devouring me. I went back to where the trolleys had stood, for I recalled having seen a news-stand there, the kind you have to put coins in a slot, but it was empty. Farther up the street was another luncheonette and, thinking they might sell papers, hurried there. A pile of late editions was on the cigar and cigarette counter,

next to the cash register. My picture and an eight-column banner wavered before my eyes and, although I'd expected it, the enormity of the spread staggered me.

MYSTERY WRITER HUNTED IN CRIPPLE'S MURDER.

I swept one off the pile, paid for it and left, thinking maybe I'd been recognised by the girl at the register, but I had no strength to run; but as quickly as I could I rounded the corner, recalling dimly that the photograph was one that used to stand on the bureau next to Ginny's and wondering through everything if she had given it to the reporters willingly or if they had taken it, and I stopped only when I was in sight of the truck. The paper shook in my hands.

Police early this afternoon issued a thirteen-state alarm for Paul R. Weiler, 30-year-old true-detective story writer, named as the "mad dog" slayer who bludgeoned partially paralysed John Rockey to death and buried his savagely mutilated body in a Taberton Hollow grave. Rockey, 28, who disappeared Thursday from his home at 3467 Gorman Street, was found early this morning in a partly covered gully.

According to Lt. Alvin Thompson, chief of the Homicide Squad, events following the discovery of the body led directly to Weiler, of 3886 Standish Street, who was gone from his apartment when police came to arrest him. Lt. Thompson's only comment upon these events was that a suspect hunted previously had been located this morning and cleared of all connection with the crime, and that they learned that Weiler, who was known to have seen Rockey last, had been a frequent visitor at the victim's home. He stated also that there is evidence which leads them to believe that the grisly murder of the helpless cripple took place in the alleged killer's own apartment.

Crushed by the news that her husband is a suspected murderer, Mrs. Virginia Weiler, 22, a former Visitor for the City Welfare Board, has been placed under a doctor's care. Prostrate with grief, she has been unable to speak with reporters. However her mother, Mrs. Maxwell Gordon, told newsmen that her daughter never wants to see Weiler again or "even hear his name".

"He has murdered an innocent man," Mrs. Gordon said. "He has ruined my daughter's life. He has thrown a shadow over all of us. Our only hope is that he is captured before he harms someone else and that he gets what he certainly deserves."

The sensational twist to this already bizarre case, a twist which finds a writer of true crime stories . . .

Walking stupefied in the direction of the truck, I thrust the paper in a crevice between rows of cartons. Ahead, the man in overalls was letting himself down from the tailboard. He saw me and held up two fingers to indicate a couple more minutes and I think I nodded and he went into the office of Pearson's Dressed Poultry, Inc., with a clipped sheath of papers. The Negroes, who worked for the poultry house, were now hauling the crates inside. My brain was like cotton: it was incapable of thought or pain, but yet some instinct for survival guided me forward and into the truck. There I sat, a breathing thing of flesh.

The door opened shortly on the other side and the man climbed behind the wheel and he said, "That wasn't too bad, was it?" and maybe I nodded again. He settled himself and pulled out keys. "Might as well get to know each other. The name's Parmer. Parmer the farmer," and he smiled like this was an old joke. He seemed older than he'd first looked, pulling those crates around, but he had a strong thick-corded neck and there was strength in his ruddy bull-doggish face; and a friendliness too that showed especially around his creased eyes.

"Mine's . . . John Anderson."

"John, Johnny or Jack?"

". . . Jack."

He had trouble with the gear shift and there was a groaning until he got it into first and the truck shuddered convulsively as it hiccoughed forward and bumped off the sidewalk. The truck moved easily up the street now, though Parmer was the kind of driver who hunched over the wheel and clenched it like it might tear free.

We had to go north, through almost the entire length of the city. Parmer did not talk for a long while, though often he glanced at me. I felt he wanted conversation but I kept looking rigidly ahead. My brain was coming back to life: it stirred, it felt, it sent out impulses, it became aware; and it was like a great

pain forming. I thought of Ginny who never wanted to see me or hear my name and, though I could not blame her, though I myself did not know if I could bear facing her again, to see the hurt I had caused and to stand before her in my shame, yet it was a lonely aching thing that she could hate me so.

... Her mother was lying! She must, she must be lying!

"You said something about being stranded," Parmer spoke up eventually. He was still bent over the wheel. When I didn't answer, he looked. "If I'm too nosey, just you say so."

I shook my head. "I . . . go to school here. The University. I do . . . graduate work. Someone's . . . sick at home and I'm pretty low on funds and I was told . . . someone told me the produce district was a good place to get a ride."

"Is it bad?"

"What?" I frowned.

"I mean is this person sick bad?"

"... Yes."

"That's a shame. I know what sickness is. The missus got the rheumatism so's she can barely walk. Can I ask what you're taking up?"

"... Psychology."

Parmer was impressed. He hadn't thought I was an ordinary sort of person, he said: the way I was dressed, how I looked, all that; real clean cut. He wouldn't have taken me otherwise because sometimes you only look for grief when you pick up riders. Anyway I sort of reminded him of his boy, though Willie was probably a good six-seven years younger. But we were built alike. Willie was in Korea. He didn't have to go, probably could have got a deferment because he helped out on the farm but all his friends were going and he got ants in his pants and joined up. And now Korea. Right on the front lines. It was making a wreck of his mother but Willie's letters were pretty cheerful.

"War, war, war," he lamented. "Killing, killing, killing! It's enough to get you sick, ain't it? Here we just get through with a war and now we got ourselves another. And there's atom bombs just waiting to be dropped on our heads. You know what I think sometimes? These chickens of mine are lucky. They don't know what's coming their way. They may end up on a table but they don't have the newspapers to worry them to death first." Parmer leaned back, relaxed at last.

"Every time I drive into the city it's the first and last time," he explained. "I still can't get used to all this traffic."

And as we rolled through the streets, while I was on the look-out for squad cars and patrolmen, staying low but not too low, the farmer kept talking. Had I ever seen a hatchery? That was something worth seeing. Especially the way they sexed chicks. I didn't know how they did that, did I? Well——

"—You're thinking of home," the farmer caught himself, "and here I'm talking you deaf and dumb. You just sit back, fellow."

"It's all right." I wished I had a cigarette. We were drawing near the city limits. So far the only squad car I had seen had been one going the other way. But ahead?

"We got a good ride in front of us. You hungry?"

"No." I was afraid he would stop inside the city. "I . . . had something . . . just before . . . remember?"

"That's right. I didn't have much of a lunch though, but I guess I can wait. There's a nice diner in Homersville. They give you a slab of pie this big."

The homes here, away from the compressure of the city, were detached, with stretches of lawn and flowers hugging the houses and bright coloured awnings with Old English initials. Approaching the city line, I knew something had to go wrong, it could not be this smooth, this easy, and I waited for it, thinking it had to come at this street or the next, squad cars suddenly converging, or certainly there'd be a road block where this street cut into the highway, and on and nothing was happening and there ahead was the highway and the truck halted at a stop sign and then chugged on, gathering speed, and we were outside the city on a two-lane highway that spread into four with a line of grass between. Wonderful beautiful highway! The tyres hummed and even the rattly motor became a symphony. I opened my window all the way, letting the air blow on my face, and it soothed the strain from it and the tiredness. I looked at the speedometer, for we mustn't be picked up by state troopers, but the needle showed well under the limit; and now within me I was urging the truck on even faster.

. . . And this was the highway Ginny and I used to take to visit my parents. This same highway . . . remember?

The memory came to me about a mile out, when a sort of dullness had come in reaction to all the pressure.

"I guess you don't recall when there were farms right inside

the city," Palmer was saying. "And I mean deep inside. But you probably were little more than a baby then. You're around twenty-six, aren't you?"

"Twenty . . . seven." *Where are you going, Paul Weiler?*

"Well, I had a cousin had a farm in there" no more than twenty, twenty-one years ago. There were lots of farms then. All of them are gone now, but I bet you didn't know there'd been any, did you?"

". . . No." *Paul, where are you going?*

"Jim—that was my cousin—he had cows and . . . no, he didn't have chickens but he had cows and horses and . . . I remember he had goats too. That was funny. You see, they built houses all around his property and the people they objected to the goats and finally Jim sold them, but they had to take him to court first. I don't think he had to sell them but he did anyway. Eventually he put the whole place up for sale, but it was a good farm. They put up a row of houses on the land. Jim's dead now."

Where was I going? Not my body, not that compound of skin and muscle and bone that could hide and run and hide and run again, that could live here or there on food and water, but rather what was within the flesh: where? The thing within that had ambitions and desires, that had so much to give in the way of love and required it in turn for its strength and nourishment, that wanted family and home and friends: where?

"See them clouds over there?" Parmer announced. "Rain clouds."

The truck bounced over a rut and the farmer grunted. Where was there life for me without Ginny?

"Maybe not though," Parmer amended. "They're pretty high. . . . Sleepy?"

"A little."

"You look it. You go on to sleep. I'm a chattery old buzzard. See what you can run into when you ask for a ride? Chattery old buzzards like me. You go on and sleep."

I shut my eyes, not that I was sleepy but because my head had started to ache again. Thoughts crowded in; I tried to clamp them out. Then I felt the truck making a complete turn and I opened my eyes to find Parmer going around a traffic circle.

"Need gas," he explained. "Didn't realise the tank was so low."

• He headed into a station at the far rim of the circle and stopped with a jerk that threw me forward. An attendant came out of a grimy little stuccoed building and wiped the windshield.

"Might as well fill 'er up," Parmer told him through the window. Then he climbed out and stretched. We had only gone about five miles. He asked for the men's room and the attendant said right inside, the door behind the desk, and the farmer walked off. When he came back he said you might as well check the oil too.

I went into the lavatory also. I took several maps from the rack next to the desk: I might need them later. A phone was on the wall behind the open front door. Ginny . . . somewhere in reach of this phone. Was she in the apartment still? I walked outside but came back in. The attendant was still pumping gas. I looked at the phone. So easy . . . just to call; perhaps . . . to hear a voice. The urge to ring the apartment was becoming overwhelming: all I wanted was to see if she were there . . . to hear her say hello . . . no more . . . no more than just to hear.

The attendant had raised the hood and was pulling out the oil stick.

I dropped a coin in the slot and stared at my feet and the operator asked what number and I gave it to her and I had to put more coins in and tell her where I was calling from; and I thought of wires being tapped and calls traced, but it didn't matter, nothing mattered but this. The first ringing, and my heart rose up like a great wave, and somehow I knew right away there would be no answer, but held on, hoping, and it kept ringing and I could picture the phone on the living-room desk; held on until the farmer called from outside, "Hey, fellow, you ready?" and even after, and he had to call me again and only then did I place the receiver back on the hook.

Parmer was already in the truck and he stretched over and opened my door, saying he was sorry to hurry me but he had to make time. The truck took its uncertain spasms forward and now we were rounding the circle again and out on one of the clean wide spokes, with rolls of ploughed fields on either side. Parmer said it was good land here but I was thinking only of the phone ringing in the empty apartment, the lonely sounds bouncing from room to room and no one to answer; no one there. That seemed to make it final, no one there. Ginny

gone; somehow, even more than my flight, this meant the end.

Where was she? Her mother's, probably: her mother telling her that everything will be all right one day, my darling, you'll forget him, he's no good, didn't I tell you he was no good, and you will forget, just you wait and see, and some day you'll be happy, really happy. . . .

"This is a stretch of road where you can really rip," Parmer said. "I'd do it but the tyres they ain't too good and anyway I always promise Anna I'll go slow."

As we rode on, as the signs told us we were fifteen and then twenty miles out of the city, Parmer became quiet but I did not know which was worse, his talk or the silence; for other voices filled the vacuum now. The voices of the tyres, the motor, the telephone poles that swished past, the countless little mouths within me, and all of them were saying: where are you going, Paul Weiler, where are you going? I sat with my hands clenched tightly and tried not to hear.

"Homersville's right ahead," Parmer said a little farther on. "We'll stop at that diner I spoke to you about. You hungry yet? I know it's a little too early for dinner but I didn't eat much and anyway I like that place. You'll eat, won't you?"

I nodded. My stomach had begun to make noises again.

"They got swell eats there," the farmer said.

He slowed up as we crossed railway tracks and the truck bumped along and soon we were on the main street of the town. The diner was between two stores and Parmer found a parking spot in front. We went up the diner steps, the farmer first. "Hope they have lamb stew," he said over his shoulder. "They make good lamb stew." He drew aside the sliding door and I followed. He headed for the counter and I was right behind; but then I saw two men with newspapers and it was as though I had hit a wall. We were less than thirty miles from the city and certainly the story was in the papers here, and maybe my picture. And if my picture——

"... Mr. Parmer."

He glanced back.

"I'll . . . be right in. Want to get something."

"Try to hurry it. I'm going to order meanwhile."

Outside I looked up and down the street. A news-stand at the corner. It was unattended and the papers were in a thin pile with a cigar-box on top. I moved away the box but didn't

have to pick up the paper. It was all there before me. On the front page. My picture—a wire service photo—and an International News Story on the left-hand column:

DETECTIVE STORY WRITER HUNTED IN PARALYTIC'S MURDER

Trailing me.

It would always trail me. Or precede me wherever I went.

I walked back to the truck. I looked at the diner and knew I couldn't go in there. I slid into the cab. Parmer might come out looking for me. What could I say? I'd say . . . I'd say I was sick and couldn't eat. I'd suddenly got sick. That wouldn't be suspicious. That—but sometime soon, maybe even to-night when he got home, he'd see the story, the picture, and then he'd have every New Jersey officer after me. But that was all right. Just let me get away from here. Far. That had to be my first move. Maybe when I got to Jersey I'd take a train somewhere, maybe to New York, and hide out among those millions of people and—
Why are you running, Paul Weiler?

. . . I'd hide out in the city and after a time I'd get in touch with my parents and—

Paul, why are you running?

I'd hide out in the city and get in touch with my parents and they'd—

. . . Why am I running? I sat back limply and tried to think it out and the only answer I could reach was that I was scared to stop running. But scared of what? My shame was out; that was over. Death? But I was already dead. The body was scampering about, but the juices and substances of my life were no more. Why am I running? To exist? Existence . . . was it enough? There was no starting again; even if I could, there was nothing I wanted to begin again—alone. I needed Ginny, and I was dead to her. I had died within myself.

Give up. Go back. Return. Let them do what they wanted to the body.

. . . Yet I was scared.

Dead, and yet I wasn't dead.

I thought of my friends on the police force. All my friends. The people who knew me. Ferguson, McHugh, even the Commissioner. All the rest. Hope was flickering in the corpse. They knew. I'd sit down with them, I'd tell them, I'd talk it all out,

I'd explain. . . I hadn't meant to kill and they would know. They'd take me to the D.A. and we'd discuss it: he hadn't meant to kill, they'd tell him. And, look, he even gave himself up. Dead, and yet I wasn't dead. The heart was thumping too fast for death, and these eyes could see colour still. Sit down and talk and explain. Years in prison, perhaps; but something . . . something remained. Running was a rattling of bones. Running was complete death.

I climbed from the truck. A little boy passed me, tossing a ball in the air. I headed for a drugstore. I went to the counter and got change. The phone booth. I breathed in, sucked in the good air. A searing pain cut across my forehead. My friend . . . Ed Ferguson. Coins went into the slot. The operator. Then a wait.

"Police Headquarters."

"Ho . . . micide, please."

". . . Homicide. Potter."

"Is . . . Detective Ferguson . . . there?"

"Hold on." ("Hey, Fergy!")

". . . This is Ferguson."

"Ed?" I bit my lip.

"Yeah."

"This . . . is Paul Weller, Ed."

"Who? Who? Where are you?"

I told him, said I wanted to give myself up to him, asked if I should take a train in and where he wanted to meet me.

"You stay right where you are," he snapped. "I'll be over."

". . . All right."

The phone clicked off. I held the receiver on my lap.

It took him an hour to get there. I waited outside, "for the drugstore was crowded and I wanted no one to see. I recognised his car. It drew up to the kerb. He was alone, and I was glad: we could talk easier. His door flew open and he strode toward me.

I lowered my eyes. I was too ashamed to look at him.

I felt my right hand being jerked up, felt the cold of handcuffs sliding around and clicking fast. They surprised me. I almost protested, until I looked up to see . . . a stranger. Ferguson was a stranger. He didn't say a word. Methodically he patted me for weapons. Then he pulled me into the drugstore. The pharmacist came from around the counter; the few customers

were staring in amazement. Ferguson asked the druggist for change, then he pulled me to the phone booth. Eventually he reached Homicide.

"Let me talk to the Lieutenant." Waiting, he kept tapping his fingers against the wall. "Lieutenant? Ferguson. You can stop looking for Weiler. That's right. I just picked up the son of a bitch," he said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

DETEKTIVE FERGUSON took off the handcuffs but just to clamp them on again, this time linking my wrists behind me so that I would be even more helpless. Grasping me by the arm he led me out of the store and through the small crowd that had gathered swiftly, and to the car. He shoved me into the front seat, banging the door shut, and came in from the other side. Faces were pressed close to the windows and somewhere a man was yelling, "Hey, Rick, hey, Rick, c'mon, hurry, you're missin' it!" Head down, I felt like nothing human—and yet in some peculiar way more human than all of them. As the car slid forward, running footsteps pounded the sidewalk; probably boys trying to keep up. Ferguson drove fast and the sounds quickly faded. The car shimmied across the railway tracks at the outskirts of town and then we were on the highway. Ferguson said nothing and for miles I kept staring at the floor mat. My shoulder-blades had begun to pain me from the twisted position of my arms and I wondered if I could ask him to put the handcuffs on in front again . . . just that and no more; but I was still too ashamed to look at him, let alone say anything. Once though when I heard him strike a match, I turned toward him. He flicked out the match and tossed it through the window. His eyes shifted to me and then away. The cigarette hanging from his lips, the hat with its upturned brim, the pustules on his neck, scabby and aflame—heft was the same man I had always known, the same man who with a gruff affection used to call me "kid", and yet I knew I must not ask him even this favour now. I had a glimpse of the stub of a finger, jutting across the steering wheel, that a bandit's bullet had sheared off, and I remembered. . . .

My head went down again. For the entire trip, though I felt his frequent glances, Ferguson never said a word to me.

. . . The city.

I could tell, even without looking. The city with its sounds. The city and its people. My wife and friends. Home is the murderer, with his arms behind his back.

The car was turning now, haltingly, as though into a driveway. I glanced up then and saw with a fresh violent churning of my heart that we were in a courtyard behind a massive grey stone building. It was one of the district station houses, I realised, and wondered why Ferguson hadn't taken me to Headquarters. Why... here? Ferguson stopped the car and came around for me. He was not gentle and as he grabbed me I clenched my teeth against the pain that shot out from my shoulders. He led me through a rear door and part way down a corridor and then up a flight of stairs. Someone came to the head of the steps and then whirled with a shout of, "They're here!" and suddenly there was a stampede above us. As we reached the top, officers flooded around us: Inspector Murray, who was in charge of the Detective Bureau, and Captain Whittier, his second in command, and Lieutenant Thompson and, behind Thompson, Ruppel, and there was Shanahan and still another man from Homicide and, coming out of his office, Lieutenant Morrissey, who was in charge of this district which I knew now was the Third, and then hurrying up the steps were several patrolmen who had been attracted by the tumult. Everyone was either patting Ferguson on the back or shaking his hand and I could hear Inspector Murray saying, "The best damn collar of the year, Fergy, you lucky bastard!" and now someone caught the lapel of my jacket and pulled me into a side room.

I had been in this room before: here, once, I'd got a story from Lieutenant Morrissey and he'd gone to the trouble of getting good pictures for me and later he'd said to mail the money to his home. The room overlooked the courtyard. Green lockers lined one wall and on the opposite side were a couple of girly calendars and a pile of thumbtacked "wanted" posters. A table and a few chairs were the only furniture and the floor was bare and worn black in spots. My handcuffs were unlocked and for a few seconds afterwards I still couldn't move my arms. My wrists were numb and the pain had spread from my shoulders across my entire back. I was pushed into a chair and my head sagged forward and tears of helplessness and resentment formed in my eyes. *Don't cry, whatever you do, don't cry!* All around me voices and one of these was Ferguson's, loud and gloating, and he was telling how I had called him, only in his version I had been "looking for a deal, the son of a bitch, can you imagine that?—he'd give himself up if I could work a deal," and how he had persuaded me to surrender—"I told him, 'Look, Weiler,

you're only gonna end up on a morgue slab, some copper's gonna blast you sure as hell,' and I said, 'No deals but you just wait there for me, at least I'll bring you back in one piece'.' This and further congratulations and the sliding back and forth of chairs and the door opening and closing and someone saying shut that window and another asking did you get in touch with the Commissioner and then . . . so very gradually . . . and I became aware of . . . silence.

Cautiously I lifted my head.

Inspector Murray was seated directly across the table from me and on one side of him was Captain Whittier and on the other Lieutenant Thompson. Lieutenant Morrissey was on the edge of the table, one leg swinging free, and against the lockers were Shanahan and Ferguson and a man from Homicide named Sands and another man was sitting in the corner with a stenographer's note-book on his knee and along the windows were other men and I knew some were behind me too, for I could hear them shuffling about. And from outside, through the closed windows, came the muffled sound of an auto horn and then the shout of a child at play and these, rather than the men, brought tears to my eyes once more and I began to cry openly, hating myself for crying but not being able to help it. And afterwards, after the tears, still no comfort, and from behind, "You should have thought of this before, brother." It was Ruppel's voice.

I wiped my eyes on my arm and swore to myself I wouldn't cry again. Not here, anyway, not before these people, for tears only seemed to anger them.

"Weiler, let's get a few things straight," Inspector Murray said. He was bald except for a semi-circle of black hair and had a long drooping face with folds under his eyes like a sad dog. I had met him once and after that he'd always nodded or said hello when we passed each other at Headquarters. Now his lips were tight and grim. "You're in trouble, mister, a hell of a lot of trouble, but you might as well get this into your head. Lying isn't going to get you out of it. It's only going to make things tougher for you, understand?"

". . . Yes." I had become eager to talk, to get it out of me, to let them know it wasn't . . . things weren't . . . not exactly, anyway, what they seemed, how the papers painted them.

"Just keep that in mind and——" He looked over my

shoulder as the door opened and a detective came in. "What's up?"

"Some reporter's on the phone. They heard a rumble we got Weiler and they been checkin' all the districts. What'd I tell 'im?"

"Oh, hell!" Murray groaned. "They don't miss anything, do they?" He tugged at his lower lip. "You tell him there's nothing to it. Say we picked up a guy but it's not Weiler. Tell him anything, only it's not Weiler, get it?"

"Right, Inspector," and as he left I knew now why I'd been brought here instead of to Headquarters where newsmen hung out. I was "on ice"—incommunicado until they learned what they wanted.

Murray turned back to me. He had bony fingers and they were like spider's legs as he held them over the table. "First of all I want to tell you a few things we know, just to give you the idea. We know all about you and Mrs. Crisponi. She told us. From the 'post' we know approximately what time Rockey died and it fits in when he was over your place, when that doctor fellow downstairs heard all the commotion. We know about this"—and he reached over and got my hand and turned it palm up so that the cut showed—"and we know a lot of other things. Which is what I mean it's no use you lying. We got a good enough case for court, Weiler, I'm telling you that right off, but we want the story from you——" and he pointed. "For your own sake," he added significantly, "for your own sake—co-operate."

"I'll . . . tell you everything, sir."

"How did you kill him?"

But all at once I became too choked up to speak, though I wanted to, and he had to repeat the question, this time a little sharper though.

"... With . . . with a crutch, sir. One of his crutches." Once again the burn of tears but I was able to keep them from spilling over.

"How many times did you hit him?"

"I . . . don't know, sir. It"—softer—"it was a lot though."

"When did you stab him, before you hit him with the crutch or afterwards?"

"Stab him?" I shook my head in bewilderment. "I—I didn't stab him."

"The coroner says there were some knife wounds." This from Captain Whittier, a short squat greying man.

"I—I tell you there was . . . that I . . . that I didn't stab him. I—I didn't even have a knife."

Lieutenant Thompson said, "This was in the apartment, wasn't it?" He spoke calmly, quietly; his arms were folded on the table.

"Yes, sir. And it was about eleven. I think about a quarter after eleven." So eager was I to talk that I was anticipating their questions. I felt somewhat stronger now.

Inspector Murray said, "What did you do then?"

"I . . . carried the body outside, to my car. It was in the garage."

"In broad daylight?" He grimaced faintly.

"Yes, sir. I . . . wrapped it in a few things."

"*Jesus Christ!*" Detective Ferguson exploded and a murmur rippled through the room. I recoiled inwardly for my words had sounded cold and brutal even to myself.

"Where did you put it in the car?" Murray questioned. He was surveying me distastefully.

"In . . . the trunk . . . sir."

"And when did you bury it?"

"That night."

"In between what did you do?"

I couldn't remember and, biting a nail, tried to think. Then it came to me and I told about cleaning up and afterwards how I'd gone out to eat with Ginny.

"You mean," Inspector Murray asked incredulously, "you mean you actually went out for a meal with that . . . with a body in your trunk?"

"I . . . didn't drive." And even this sounded so different from the way I meant it.

"He didn't drive," Murray repeated with a sigh, turning to Whittier. He shrugged and gestured hopelessly.

Lieutenant Thompson, in that same even voice of his, said, "What did you do with the crutches and the things you wrapped the body in?"

"I . . . got rid of them . . . in the rubbish." But nothing I said was coming out quite the way I wanted. I was growing more nervous and my head ached across the eyes.

After a long silence during which all eyes burned on me, a silence I know was purposeful on their part, the Inspector spoke up again. "How long have you known Mrs. Crisponi?"

I drew in a breath. "About five . . . maybe six months."

Captain Whittier said, "You were jumpin' her, weren't you?"

Swallowing, I looked down. This was harder to confess than the murder. "I . . . was intimate . . . with her."

"Keep that head up!" Whittier ordered. Then, "You were keeping her, weren't you?"

"I . . . gave her money . . . now and then."

Inspector Murray said, "You never told her you were married, did you?"

"I . . . don't know." And actually I didn't. Claire had never asked or seemed to care, yet always I had assumed she knew.

"How did she find out?"

Frowning, "I don't know what you mean, Inspector."

"What I mean? What I mean?" he demanded impatiently. "You know damn well what I mean! You two had a quarrel, didn't you? She found out you were married and she broke off with you but you insisted on coming around even though she told you to stay away."

Mouth open, I kept shaking my head, trying to find words of denial.

(And from outside: "Hey, Eddie, you give me that ball!")

"Didn't you have a fight with her?" the Inspector pursued. "Didn't you hit her?"

"Once . . . once I struck her but . . . it wasn't over that. It—"

"And I guess Rockey didn't come over to your place Thursday to tell your wife to keep you the hell away from her?"

("Eddie, you gonna give me that ball?")

"Oh, no!" I rose from the chair and then sank back before hostile eyes.

"Look, Weiler," Murray said, "I don't want any crap from you, you hear? You've been doing pretty good up to now, but no crap, hear? We don't take any crap from you! After what you've done, we've been pretty damn decent to you. But don't take advantage. Now you listen to me, you get this straight. We want the real story, we don't want any half-assed stories, get it? You got that? Now let's start over. We spoke to Mrs. Crisponi. I told you we spoke to her. And she told us everything. She told us how you kept coming around after she said she didn't want to see you any more and how you had a big fight with her one day last week and how Rockey came in and stopped you

. . . from killing her. He threatened to tell your wife if you didn't stay away but you came back the night before the murder and Mrs. Crisponi told Rockey and she asked him what she should do and he said leave it up to him."

"She . . . she's lying." Weakly, for I had no strength. "Claire . . . she's lying to you." *

"*She's lying?*" Inspector Murray got to his feet in disgust. He stalked from the table then whirled toward me. "Rockey did come over to tell your wife, didn't he? But she wasn't home, she was at work. You knew she wouldn't be home until after five—we spoke to her, Weiler, we *know*—so it wasn't that you got panicky she'd walk in on you. You didn't kill this guy out of panic, Weiler. What was it then? Were you angry he was trying to break up a good thing for you—*interfering*? Was that it—that he was trying to stand in the way of you and a piece of tail? Or did you just get *sore* he was trying to preach to you to stay home and be a decent husband? Or was it just that you knew you had to get rid of him, sooner or later you had to get rid of him, for he knew too much, was willing to talk too much——"

"Oh, no!" I whimpered in protest. I brought my hands up to my face. "No, no, no!"

. . . And then an awareness of the silence again and my hands came down slowly. Inspector Murray was still standing, but his back was turned like he couldn't stomach the sight of me, and Captain Whittier and Lieutenant Thompson were staring into my eyes and Lieutenant Morrissey kept swinging that leg and the other men . . . all around me the other men . . .

" . . . Tell me," Lieutenant Thompson said then, hunched over his folded arms, "if it's none of these, why did you kill Rockey?"

"I——" But I was so confused I couldn't think and I was trying to get the story straight in my mind, to be able to tell it exactly as it had taken place, but the pieces wouldn't come together and I kept floundering mentally.

"Come on, come on," Captain Whittier prodded.

"It . . . it just happened," I mumbled finally.

"Here it comes," complained Inspector Murray.

"It . . . just happened," I repeated. "I—I didn't mean to kill him. I swear to God, I swear to God I didn't mean to kill him. But he kept taunting me and he spat on me and I begged him

"to go, to leave me alone, but he kept cursing me and then . . . then it . . . happened." But I knew this wouldn't do, that I wasn't making sense, and I managed to grope back and find the beginning and now haltingly I told about finding Claire and John Rockey together and how I never wanted to see her again and how Rockey had come to me that morning and what he'd said about Claire and James Peterson, the man her husband had killed, about . . . everything, everything I could think of. "He said he was there to spit on me like I spat on him and I kept asking him to leave, I begged him, I swear to you I begged him, but he spat on me and stuck the crutch in my chest and I just . . . I just went——" I was staring at my hands, sure now that they believed, for they had to believe, it was the truth—"I just went . . . went out of my mind and I did . . . that terrible thing." My eyes came up. "I swear to you I didn't mean it, I didn't——"

" . . . Bull!"

This came from behind and I turned dazedly to see who said it and then from in front this time another, "Bull!" and this was Inspector Murray and he was nodding and coming close. "You heard him," he said. "Bull!" He dropped into his chair. He leaned forward, over one arm. "Weiler, you're one dirty no-good son of a bitch. You're a no-good son of a bitch bastard, you're the worst lying stinking bastard I ever came across in my life, and believe me, I've come across some bastards! You stink so much I can smell it! You get me sick, you make me want to vomit!" His body eased back but his eyes still blazed. "You'd do anything to save your own filthy hide, wouldn't you? You haven't hurt Mrs. Crisponi enough, have you? Now you've got to ruin her completely! It's bad enough you've killed, you've murdered a *cripple*, an innocent helpless cripple, that's not bad enough, but now you've got to ruin an innocent woman—her name, her reputation, everything!"

My head dropped as though I'd been punched.

"LOOK AT ME! Goddam you, you bastard, *you look at me!* . . . John Rockey's dead. James Peterson's dead. Sure, they're perfect witnesses for you, but goddam your hide, mister, it's not going to work! It's not going to work because we're not going to let it work! And as for that temporary insanity bull, that's not going to work either. You mark my word it's not! . . . Now listen to me! For the last time, you listen to me! You knew damn well what you were doing when you killed Rockey. You weren't no

more nuts than you are right now—and now you're a scheming conniving son of a bitch bastard! . . . Buddy," and he was shaking his head for emphasis as he spoke, "we're going to do our best to put you right where you belong. If there's a God above, if there's a God in heaven, if there's any justice in this world, you're going to go right into that chair. We're going to see that you fry because if there's anyone deserves frying, if there's anyone deserves less mercy than——" He cut himself off with a violent gesture and stood up again. "Someone else talk to this bastard a while," he said hoarsely. "I'm up to here with him."

". . . Weiler." It was Thompson. His voice was almost a whisper after the Inspector's.

". . . Yes, Lieutenant." I couldn't keep from crying again. I rubbed fingers into my eyes.

"You wrote a story on Mrs. Crisponi for *Squadcar Magazine*, didn't you?"

". . . Yes, sir." My voice was cracked and my breath came in gasps.

"She showed it to me this morning. I just skimmed through it but I got the gist of it. What I mean, Weiler, is that you pictured her altogether differently from what you're doing now. You described her then as quite a wonderful woman."

"Lieutenant," I said earnestly, "that . . . that was just a . . . story. I—I didn't know, I didn't know the truth about her. It was just a . . . story," I said again.

"But which are we to believe—what you're telling us now, which is awfully hard to swallow, Weiler, or what you yourself wrote?"

"I'm telling you the truth now, Lieutenant. I'm telling you what I actually saw, what Rocky told me, what——" But Thompson was gazing at the table-top and shaking his head, almost to himself. "Lieutenant," I appealed, "remember . . . remember what you told me once about never prejudging a person? Remember, remember that time? Remember what you said to me—it was in your office? I was after a story then and you told me, you said don't ever prejudge a person, things aren't always . . . what they seem. You said that to me, you yourself said that to me, Lieutenant. I—I didn't understand exactly what you meant then, I didn't care to understand, but you were right and if you meant what you said, if they weren't just words, then . . . then you'll listen to me, at least you'll try to believe, you'll——"

Detective Ferguson, stepping away from the lockers, interrupted with, "Lieutenant, can I just speak my piece? I can't take this punk's guff any more and you're just wasting your breath on him. This guy's no damn good, that's all there is to it. He was cheating on his wife and at the same time he was lying to Mrs. Crisponi and taking advantage of her when she needed someone, when she was just getting over trouble, and now like the Inspector says he's trying to ruin her altogether. What I'm driving at, Lieutenant, is that you just can't talk to this sort o' low-life, he don't deserve it. What he needs is a couple of goddam good belts square in the teeth. You'd be surprised how it'd loosen him up. Just give me one crack at him, one crack——"

Instead of answering, the Lieutenant, his forehead squeezed into a frown, lifted himself up from the table and went over to the Inspector. He spoke to him for a few moments, his hands in his pockets, and then Murray nodded. Thompson came back to me. He patted me on the shoulder. "Come on with me, Weiler." And yet it didn't sound like an order the way he said it.

He walked ahead and I followed and it felt strange that no one was holding me or pulling or shoving me; I'd forgotten in this short space of time how it was to . . . just walk, with arms by your sides. He went out to the corridor and I had to go past Detective Ruppel, so stiffly erect and with his double chin, and Thompson was waiting for me in the hall and he walked in front again to Lieutenant Morrissey's office. He opened the door for me and then closed it as I entered and motioned me into a chair. He took the one behind Morrissey's desk. He brought out a pack of cigarettes and offered it to me. I was afraid, suspicious . . . even of this.

"Take one," he insisted, shaking the pack. "It'll do you good."

I did and he came forward and lighted it for me and then lighted another for himself. I sucked in and couldn't hold my fingers still.

"Have you had anything to eat?"

" . . . No."

"What can I get you?"

" . . . Nothing. Nothing, sir. I . . . I can't eat."

"Coffee? A sandwich?"

"No . . . thank you. I don't think I could get anything down."

"Later then." The swivel chair creaked as he sat back. ". . . What are you thinking of, Paul?"

It surprised me the way he called me by my first name and there was such a flooding of emotion through me that I became too full to speak. I almost cried again.

"I want to know," he said kindly. "Tell me what you're thinking."

"Just that . . . I appreciate your treating me this way. You don't make me feel like . . . an animal."

"Paul, listen to me. I want you to trust me. I want you to think of me as a friend and trust me. And maybe"—he crossed his legs and locked his hands over one knee—"maybe knowing something about me will help you . . . trust me. You know, sometimes I still can't believe I grew up on this side of the law, that I ended up a cop. You've got no idea what a miracle it is. I was brought up in Kenwick and if you think that district's bad today you should have seen it when I was a kid. If you weren't one of the gang then you were an outsider and that meant getting your face pushed in every time you walked out the door. I did plenty of petty stealing when I was a kid, Paul, and once I was this far from going to the reformatory. . . . Look, I'm not taking credit for how I snapped out of it, for the fact that I'm a cop and that plenty of the fellows I ran around with are in prison for the rest of their lives and a couple ended up in the chair. I'm not taking credit for that. I just thank God that somehow I got straightened out. But what I'm trying to say is that I understand, I think I understand anyway, how a kid can go bad. And I think that's made me a better cop, I don't know." He picked up his burning cigarette from the ash-tray and drew in. "You're something different though," he went on. "You're a lot different from the average guy we get in here. I don't know, but from what I'm guessing you've had all the breaks in life and never really had a hard time of it. And yet with all these advantages you go and get yourself so . . . damned messed up. I want to try to . . . understand you, Paul. Maybe the reason I want to try to understand you is that . . . I got a kid myself. He's in college and I'm pretty goddam proud of him, just like I'm sure . . . your father was always proud of you. Your folks still living, Paul?"

". . . Yes." How I wished—oh, how I wished they were dead!

"Tell me, were you close to your father?"

• "I guess I was in a way, sir, but . . . it's hard to remember. He was always pretty busy. He's a doctor."

"Yeah." He said it like somehow that might be the whole trouble, that perhaps I wouldn't be here now if it weren't for that. He cleared his throat and tapped off ash. "I've never been able to spend too much time with my boy either. Funny thing is I never realised it until he went away to college and now that . . . well, when he graduates he's going right into the damn service. Were you in the service, Paul?"

I nodded.

"Overscas?"

"Yes, but . . . I didn't see any action."

"But I guess you saw plenty of other things, didn't you?"

"I . . . saw a lot of misery, sir, if that's what you mean."

"How old were you then?"

"I was just out of college. I think I was twenty. Maybe almost twenty-one."

"Probably still wet behind the ears too. Like my kid. I guess . . . you run into all kinds of women . . . you do things you never did before . . . in the service, I mean."

"You . . . can . . . get involved in things, sir. It can be easier . . . there."

"Yeah." He worked his cigarette hard into the ash-tray. Looking up, "You do think of me as a friend, don't you, Paul?"

"I do. You don't know how much I do."

"I don't want you to think of me as a cop now. Forget I'm a cop. Think of me only as a friend, someone . . . you can talk it all out to. I'm not here to hurt you, I want you to believe me on that. I want to help you, I don't know what I can do but I want to help you. And you're in one God-awful mess, son, I don't know how you got into it but you're in one God-awful mess. You're in the worst mess a person can get himself into."

"I . . . I know, sir."

"Those fellows out there," and he nodded toward the door, "they're losing their patience. That's why I wanted to get you on the side, to talk to you alone. I don't want to see you roughed up. They're a bunch of angry men, Paul, and in a way," he said carefully, "in a way, though I don't go for the rough stuff, it's not too hard to understand how they feel. You've committed a terrible crime, Paul, a terrible, terrible crime. You realise fully what you did, don't you?"

"Mr. Thompson . . . Lieutenant . . . I—I . . . believe me, I would give my own life, I would die so willingly . . . if I could only, if I could only bring him . . . back. You don't know——"

He nodded. "Paul, I wish I could tell you how many fellows I've had sitting here before me like you are now—and saying just about the same thing. . . . But this," and he sighed, "this isn't getting us anywhere, is it?" He fixed his elbows on the desk, fingers coiled under his chin. "Paul, I want you to start right from the beginning again, I want you to tell me the whole story, the whole truth, I want you to tell me everything. If you think of me as a friend, if you want me to help you, you're going to have to tell me . . . everything."

What more could I say than I had already said? But I tried. In detail I started from where I had first visited Claire Crisponi to get her story. I told him about the night of her husband's execution and what had happened and how, though I hated myself for it, I kept coming back. The one thing I couldn't say, which I would never be able to bring myself to reveal even if my life depended on it, was what drove me to her: for Ginny's sake I could never tell that. But I spoke about the turn my writing had taken and of finding Rockey and Claire together and of Davenport and his suicide (I'd forgotten to tell the others this; how could I have slipped up on something so important?) and how I was certain I had lost the ability to write decent things again (and this, too, I'd forgotten) and then once more of Rockey coming to me and of his taunts.

"Lieutenant, I . . . I can't explain it, but when I was hitting him it wasn't so much *him* I was killing, but something . . . something horrible. I've been trying so hard to think it out and maybe . . . maybe it was myself I was trying to destroy. . . . for having been so rotten. He kept saying I was no better than he was and . . . it was true and I . . . I couldn't stand it and I didn't want to hear or know and——" In reliving the crime I had come forward to the edge of the chair, body tense, but now I sagged a little. "I know it sounds crazy, I know it sounds all made up, but . . . that's . . . that's just about the way it happened. It . . . it just happened, sir." Then, "You . . . you do believe me, don't you? I'm not trying to lie, to get out of anything, I—I just want you to know the truth."

His hands hadn't moved from under his chin. His expression remained set, thoughtful; it offered no clue.

"You . . . you do believe me, don't you?" I repeated—not sure, not sure at all.

Slowly Lieutenant Thompson brought down his hands. He appeared to be searching for words. He drew another cigarette out of the pack but didn't light it. "Paul, actually what I believe . . . that isn't the important thing."

"What . . . do you mean?"

"Just that"—he put down the cigarette and looked directly at me—"just that what is important is what a judge and twelve jurors are going to believe. And I'm afraid . . . Paul, I'm very afraid they won't go for it."

"But *why*? Lieutenant . . . what I told you . . . it's the . . . it's the *truth*."

"Paul, I'm not going to mince words with you. I'd only be fooling you if I did. I wouldn't be doing you any good. Your life's at stake here. You might as well get one thing clear—there isn't a single doubt in my mind but that the district attorney's going to ask for the death penalty. I don't like to scare you," he said as my head went down, "but you might as well know the true picture. You do want me to give it to you straight, don't you?"

" . . . Yes." Was that my voice?

"The D.A. is going to stand up before that jury. He's going to point to you. He's going to say that this man here has committed an atrocious crime of first-degree murder. He's going to tell that jury that you deliberately killed a cripple, he's going to emphasise that word cripple, and he's going to tell how you dug a grave and buried the body and tried to conceal your crime in every way. Paul, I hate to do this to you but you've got to know. What do you think the D.A. is going to say was the motive behind that murder? He's going to point to you again and he's going to say that the motive was that this man here, this man who pretends he was insane at the time, this college graduate, this man of way above average intelligence, this man who knew all there is to know about crime from his work, that this man murdered just so that he could go on leading a double life! Paul, I *see* it! I'm telling you I see it."

He paused, probably waiting for me to say something. I couldn't. Then in a softer voice, "Paul, what chance do you think you'll have? Do you think they'll believe your story that Rockey was having an affair with Mrs. Crisponi and that he'd taunted you about her having run around with James Peterson?

Do you think they'll believe these things when . . . when you yourself had written what a fine wife she was? And another thing. This business of Peterson! They're probably going to call me on the stand, I'm sure they will, and maybe ask me why Peter Crisponi killed James Peterson. And do you know what I'll have to say if they ask that? That he murdered him because of robbery and definitely not because of any triangle. I can't say anything else, Paul, for Crisponi himself—he never mentioned any other motive. It's all a matter of police record . . . Paul, are you listening?"

" . . . Yes. I—I hear you."

"Paul, they're also going to ask me why John came to your apartment. Do you know what I'll have to tell them? I'll have to give them Mrs. Crisponi's story about Rockey breaking up a fight between you two and that he said he'd try to make you stay away from her. I'll have to tell them that, Paul. Can you understand me? You'll probably hate me then, you'll think I'm against you, but that's what I'll have to say. . . . Listen to me, fellow."

"I . . . I'm listening, Lieutenant." His words were like hammer blows against my brain.

"I'm telling you this for your sake. I want you to know what to expect. Do you think a jury will believe your story of temporary insanity when certainly it was no insane man who went into Taberton Hollow at night with a body in the trunk of his car? And Taberton Hollow too, Paul. Don't you think they'll believe that was part of a premeditated plan—since you knew that that was the place Crisponi had buried his victim? You've got to be sensible about this, Paul."

"What . . . What's there for me to do?"

I had to give a credible story, he answered; that was the first thing. I must not accuse Mrs. Crisponi of anything, for instead of helping it would only work against me. I had to admit my guilt, but without the trimmings of temporary insanity. Then if I were wise I would plead guilty and waive a jury trial and throw myself on the mercy of the court. If I signed a believable confession and went purged and repentant into court, most likely the judges would take into consideration the fact that I had given myself up and that I had co-operated with the police *in every way* and—although Thompson admitted he could guarantee me nothing—there was an excellent chance I would get no more than life. And life imprisonment, Paul—actually life

meant serving about twenty years and some even got out in fifteen or less. Fifteen-twenty years was not for ever, was it? It was not final, it was not *death*. The other way however was so much more a gamble against the electric chair and the odds would be tremendous against me and I would be fighting almost alone.

Thompson's voice droned on and I kept looking at the floor, wondering what to do, uncertain and wanting desperately to believe in something, in someone. Here was the only friend I had; everyone else was against me. Could I afford to lose Thompson also, to turn down the one hope I had of . . . living?

Fifteen-twenty years . . .

A man could still have something left.

Thompson was standing now. He said, "I'm going to call in the clerk." He waited for me to say something. I didn't. He began to walk toward the door.

". . . Lieutenant." I turned in my chair.

"What, Paul?"

"What . . . will I say . . . in the confession?"

He frowned. "What do you mean what'll you say?"

"Why . . . will I say I killed him? What was my reason?"

"You'll just say what happened."

"But I've already told you what happened, what . . . *really* happened. Didn't you"—shaking my head—"didn't you believe . . . a word of it?"

"Paul, do we have to go through this again? I told you what's important——"

"But you . . . you didn't believe me at all, did you? After"—I didn't want to say this, I didn't want to risk getting him angry, yet I had to get it out, I was still human, still alive—"after all your talk of not prejudging anyone, you still . . . you still only believe . . . what you want to believe."

If I offended him, he didn't show it. He said patiently, "I'm trying to do the best I can for you. I'm trying to be your friend and you won't let me. Why won't you let me? . . . Paul, do you hear them out there? They're waiting. I won't be able to stay here with you much longer."

"But . . . I didn't mean to kill Rocky. It wasn't . . . what you're trying to make me say. It wasn't because he was interfering or I was afraid . . . he'd tell my wife. It wasn't anything like that. Lieutenant, I—I don't know if I was insane then or not. All I know is . . . just what happened."

"I . . . won't be able to hold them off much longer, Paul."

I turned away and sat with my forehead on my hands, trying to think this thing out. I don't know how it came to me then, but suddenly in the jumble of my thoughts I recalled something that Ferguson had told me once about confessions, where the "rough" cops threatened you and if that did not produce results then a "good" cop took over, mellowing you with kind words and assurances and, as you sat there, out of contact with the world, friendless except for this one man, the hope he offered seemed the only hope you would ever have and if you were human at all you grasped at it in desperation.

"Paul, they won't let me wait. I'm going to have to leave. I'm trying to help you. Can't you understand I'm trying to help you? . . . Do you hear me?"

Was all this part of what Ferguson had spoken about? Or was . . . or was Thompson sincere?

"Don't you hear me? I'm going to have to leave. Paul, listen to me. I'm going to give you to five. I'm going to count five and then I'm . . . leaving. I don't want to do it, I swear I don't want to do it, but you're giving me no alternative. You're not even . . . listening. Paul, I'm going to count to five."

I was thinking now of that electrocution scene that Thompson had written and how his ending words had been something like he wasn't against the electric chair but that you . . . you had to be *sure*. That was it, you had to be . . . sure. Was that the answer, that Thompson here—a good cop, a sincere and honest cop—had some doubts and didn't want me . . . to die . . . to be on his conscience? He didn't want me to die . . . like this anyway . . . clinging to my story, never erasing that . . . that single doubt. And for the sake of his conscience did Thompson want me to affirm . . . just what he already believed?

"One."

And could I actually blame him for not believing me? Was that his fault? Would I . . . would I myself, standing apart, have believed it from another? Had I . . . always shown or sought such understanding? And certainly Thompson, meaning well, was right that no one would believe me and now my only chance was to "co-operate" and,—

"Two."

—And confess that . . . that *what*? That Rockey had come over to tell Ginny, that—

"Three, Paul. Paul, won't you listen to reason?"

—That I had murdered him because he knew too much? Or that I had killed him because I wanted to continue my double life, that I still hoped to keep seeing Claire?

"Four."

And Ginny . . . Ginny reading this, reading that I had murdered a man just to maintain an affair—Oh, how could I let her think that? Perhaps if I kept to my story she would believe; despite her mother she would believe and perhaps, perhaps this way at least I could salvage . . . something.

"Five. It's five, Paul."

Maybe *she* . . . maybe Ginny at least would believe the truth. Maybe she would understand that . . . I had tried to be good. And if she didn't, what difference whether I lived or died?

"Paul, I'm going to walk out of here. Don't you . . . care?"

I shook my head and could feel him watching me. Now I heard the sound of his footsteps moving away. I knew he was standing by the door, looking at me. "Paul, won't you . . . let me help you?" I didn't reply. A few more seconds passed. Then the door opened. It closed behind him.

. . . Now it was opening again.

"Weiler." A gravelly voice.

I didn't turn though my stomach grew knotted. Footsteps approached me from behind.

"You get on your feet."

I did. Slowly. It was Ferguson. He had his jacket off but he was still wearing his hat. Behind him were Ruppel and Inspector Murray and Captain Whittier; a few others stood near the door. Lieutenant Thompson hadn't returned.

Ferguson said, "You in the mood to tell the truth yet?"

"I . . . did tell the truth . . . Mr. Ferguson."

"Don't you 'mister' me, you bastard! . . . Look up there!" he commanded suddenly and instinctively I glanced at the ceiling. I didn't see the punch coming but it hit me in the stomach and I doubled over, then felt my head being raised, someone was pulling my hair, and a fist shot into the same spot and I was staggering and being raised again and now the blurry face of Ferguson was before me. He grabbed hold of my shirt. He started banging me against the wall. . . .

The door to the station-house cell clanged shut. I just about had strength enough to reach the cot. I fell across it. Blood trickled out of the side of my mouth and was sliding coolly down my chin and neck. It didn't matter. I couldn't remember what I had signed, but somehow that didn't matter any more either.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

FOR hours I remained motionless on the cot, my head bursting, sick to my stomach and in pain. The bleeding had stopped and I could feel its caked lines on my skin: it was from a cut inside my lip, where I'd bitten it during the beating: Ferguson had been careful to hit me everywhere but on the face. The mattress was thin, hard and lumpy and had a damp smell; the wall I faced oozed dampness too and the toilet next to the cot gurgled every couple of minutes as it flushed automatically. A light burned in the corridor, throwing irregular bar-shadows across the wall. Sounds from the street were able to penetrate my cage.

I lay there like a dull and apathetic brute. They had broken me so completely that I could not even hate them. There was no protest in me, no emotion flickered, not even self-pity. I had accepted what they had sought to impress upon me: my nothingness. Until then I mistakenly had thought that I was a human being who had committed murder, but they had taught me otherwise. I was a murderer who once perhaps—when?—had been a human being. I had stepped over the human boundary though and was now merely a thing to be bullied, pushed and led along the assembly line of justice; I was in the impersonal hands of men who seemed to have been waiting a long time for me just to cross over. I was nothing, a thing without will or self-direction. These had been taken from me and, though nothingness was hard to accept, once you did they could do no more to you. If someone had come to me then and said there was a car parked by a back door and it was only a short ride to the death house and everything would happen quickly and without fuss, I believe I would have followed silently. I did not want the effort or further torture of a trial; I did not want to see people. I yearned for a grave for my body, the only part of me that persisted upon living on. I wanted to be buried and forgot.

Every five minutes or so throughout the night the turnkey left his desk at the end of the corridor and walked over to peer

through the bars. He would linger as though to make absolutely sure I was still breathing. I lay fully clothed with one arm thrown over my face to shut out the light. While I don't think I fell asleep until close to dawn, later however I was to read where the turnkey told reporters that I had "slept like a baby".

"Hey, there! Hey, you, hey!"

For a few waking seconds I had no idea where I was. Then the rough concrete wall next to me took shape and I turned over and saw the pattern of bars and in the other side of the door the turnkey; and with these came a wrenching inside me, for I had lulled myself to sleep with the thought that perhaps somehow I would die instead of wake.

"Okay, on your feet . . . Come on, let's go, I ain't got all morning!"

I lifted myself up and my stomach seemed on fire and my head still ached. I slid off the cot, sore in every muscle, but as I rose my pants began to fall and I clutched them: I had forgotten that they had taken away my belt. The turnkey was holding a paper bag through the bars. I took it, one hand grasping the front of my trousers, and manœuvred back to the cot. The bag held a container of coffee and a couple of doughnuts. I tried to sip the coffee but the smell made my stomach rise up. I waited and then slowly took a few swallows. I started to retch and hurried to the wash-basin. The nausea gradually passed. Turning on the water, I wet my face. The water came away pink. My legs were wobbly and I returned to the cot and sat on the edge of it. Elbows propped on my knees, I let my throbbing head sag on to my hands. I don't know how long I sat that way. The turnkey kept coming back and looking in. The flushing of the toilet was like a clock tolling the passing of time.

. . . The door was opening.

It was the turnkey and behind him was Detective Ruppel. I brought my hands down and straightened carefully. The turnkey stepped aside and Ruppel came forward. He threw me my belt. I caught it, not sure what to do.

"Put it on, put it on, don't just sit there."

Watching him cautiously, I slid it through the loops. He indicated for me to stand and when I did he produced handcuffs and clamped one bracelet on me, the other around his own wrist. Wordlessly he led me out of the cell and down the corridor and up the stairs. Detective Ferguson was waiting in a side room. Ferguson looked at me from head to foot, like he was

examining a slab of beef, then nodded at Ruppel and sauntered ahead. We followed. A car was parked outside, a detective behind the wheel. Ferguson got in behind, then Ruppel prodded me in next and settled heavily beside me. I felt like a little boy squeezed between them. The car pulled away. No one spoke.

They drove me to Headquarters, stopping at a side door where the black vans of the county prison always let off and took on prisoners. I used to stand here many times and watch; usually there was a crowd, especially during the morning hours or lunch. Now fortunately no one was around. They whisked me through the door and up a circular flight of iron stairs and then out of another door. A corridor stretched ahead. An arrow pointed to the Detective Bureau; I recalled how I used to approach it from the opposite end of the hall. I felt myself growing ill again, from tension. A few officers were clustered around the entrance. They parted to let us through. As we entered the Complaint Room, men stepped forward from each wall and a dozen cameras raised up all at once.

The room was filled with reporters and photographers. My head dropped and I brought up my free arm to shield my face entirely. Just then someone grabbed me by the hair and pulled back my head and I struggled but couldn't tear free and through closed eyelids could see the red dazzle of flashbulbs.

"Keep 'im that way a second, will yuh, Jim?"

"Hey, Jim, over this way. That's it, keep him still."

"Just one more shot. One more shot? Let's see more of his face this time. That's the baby."

The fingers relaxed on my hair. Down went my head again. I hated myself for that struggle. *Be a man; be more of a man than any of them!* But still I couldn't make myself look up. A hand caught my arm. I was being directed into the depths of the Bureau. Somewhere behind me a door slammed shut. The handcuffs were unlocked. I raised my eyes to find myself in a room that was three-quarters filled with filing cabinets. I was led to a counter. There a man in shirt sleeves took my right arm and shook it to ease the stiffness from it. Fingerprints. He pressed each finger on an ink pad and rolled it on a blocked chart. He did the same with my left hand. Afterwards he handed me a rag to wipe my fingers. Now I was being taken into another room. This was for the Rogues' Gallery. They sat me on a stool in front of a camera and hung a numbered placard from my neck. Two views: front and profile. My head began to shake but the

photographer, didn't say anything. Lifted to my feet, I noticed that Inspector Murray and Lieutenant Thompson had come into the room. They were talking together and once Thompson looked my way but his eyes skirted my face. Ruppel was holding out the handcuffs now. This time he linked my wrists together so that they hung limply in front. His forefinger twisting the cloth of my jacket sleeve, he led me out to the Complaint Room, the others following. We walked into the corridor.

This time a number of people were standing against the walls as we headed toward the same rear door. My head sank immediately. I was surrounded by officers. The iron stairs clattered as we went down. The patrolman at the bottom opened the door. A crowd had formed out there: mysteriously, word had spread that I would be coming out. Hostile faces stared at me; instinctively I shrank back. Thompson was next to me and he seemed to share my apprehension, as though thinking these people had gathered to harm me. He held my arm, but not tightly, and ushered me forward. My teeth were pressed into my lower lip and I was looking at my feet. A hum of voices all around, some jabbing out loud and clear.

"You better buy yourself an asbestos suit, fellow!"

"Hey, Weiler, you're pretty good at killing cripples, ain't you?"

I lifted my head: I don't know why, what change came over me, but I did. Walking, I stared straight ahead.

"Look at 'em eyes. You see 'em eyes?"

"He's a calm one, ain't he?"

The car, and I entered after Ruppel. This time Thompson sat on the other side of me. The car slid forward, parting the crowd. "They oughta string you up by the ears, that's what they oughta do!" A black and white squad car joined us on the main street, then went in front. Its siren wailed. Later I was to learn that another automobile filled with newsmen was behind.

The caravan cut through the entire city. People stopped to look. No one within our car said anything. Once though Thompson held a cigarette out to me. It came as a surprise. Though I wanted one, I shook my head. He pressed a pack into my shirt pocket. Somehow this made me feel bad—even sorry for him in a way. I know he kept looking at the side of my face.

From our direction I sensed we were going to Taberton Hollow. I was right. The caravan turned into the lane and bumped down it and halted just about where I had stopped that night. I climbed

out, chained hands swaying in front of me. The others gathered around. Inspector Murray stepping forward took charge. He made me show them how I had dragged the body off the lane and to the gully; he made me stand in the gully and bend down and describe how I had scooped out the dirt. Photographers—newsmen and a police photographer—were taking pictures all the time. I don't know why I had to do this, but probably it was to verify with pictures what I had confessed to. But the whole thing only took about ten minutes and now I was being led to the car again. The caravan split up after a while, the newsmen going one way, the black and white squad car another. Thompson, Ferguson and Ruppel took me back to the Third District where I was placed in the same cell. For the first time since the previous evening, Thompson spoke to me. He asked if I wanted anything. I shook my head and went to the cot and sat on it. I heard him move away. Later, I smoked a couple of his cigarettes.

The turnkey brought me a hot meal for lunch. I was able to get down some of the food. Afterwards I lay across the cot, trying to sleep but being unable to. Once the turnkey asked if I wanted a magazine. I didn't answer. Much later, probably toward late afternoon, a key turned in the lock. I looked around, the way I'd seen animals look around in their cage when they're disturbed. It was the turnkey. "You got a visitor," he announced.

I climbed off the cot, heart lurching. The turnkey stood by the open door. Footsteps approached. Who could be coming to see me? I didn't want visitors! I wanted to be left alone, to be forgotten, to——

My father was standing now in the doorway. He had always been a distinguished-looking man, tall, erect and handsome. It was as though he'd aged by twenty years. He looked so old and tired and broken. He was holding his hat and tears formed in his eyes and his lips began to tremble. Behind him in the corridor was a group of patrolmen and detectives. I wanted to whirl around and throw myself in a corner and tell him to go away and forget about me; but all I could do was stare at him. He came forward. Then he put his arms around me and held me tight, his body shaking with sobs. I had to steel myself not to break down. I swore, holding him, that I would not: I would not give those men out there the satisfaction of seeing what they had come to witness. They despised me for my one murder; I hated them for their many small ones. My father stepped back

and his watery eyes surveyed me. He was trying to say something but could not. He kept gesticulating futilely. The only words he was able to get out were, "Don't you worry, we—we'll get a lawyer . . . Mama . . . me . . . we—we're sticking by you." Then his face went even whiter and his legs buckled and he collapsed to the floor. I dropped next to him but a detective, rushing in, pushed me aside. Now I was hovering around frantically. A second detective ran for water and they wet his face. Gradually my father stirred. They helped him up and he sat on the cot, head down. After a few minutes he stood up shakily. He tried to say something else to me but looked like he was going to faint again. Detective Ruppel told him he'd best leave now, that he shouldn't have come so soon in the first place. My father nodded. Then he came over and kissed me. My arms hung. Ruppel had to lead him out. The door closed behind them. My father stopped and turned. In a choked voice he said if I wanted anything, clothes or anything like that, to tell the police and they'd let him know. He said, "Don't worry, sonny." Then he left, his hands to his face. Detective Ruppel was the last to go and he glared at me. I stood by the bars as the footsteps faded. Then I slid down, crumbling to the floor not in a faint but out of weakness. There I cried, a fist jammed against my mouth so the turnkey wouldn't hear.

"Just in case you save clippings," the turnkey said that evening. He threw a newspaper between the bars and it dropped on the concrete floor. I stared at it from my cot, then after about a minute went to it like an animal teased by food. It was an early afternoon edition and I had to read against the bars, by the corridor light. The front page headline screamed

**"KILLED TO SEAL ROCKEY'S LIPS"
WEILER SAYS**

And beneath: "Writer Confesses Murdering Paralytic to Keep Fires of Love Nest Burning." The picture they used of me was one showing Detective Ruppel pulling my head back by the hair, my face contorted like an enraged beast's. The caption under it was: "The killer being restrained from lunging at reporters." There also were shots of Rockey, Ferguson and one of the apartment foyer where the crime had been committed.

Paul Weiler, described by astounded neighbours and friends as a "mild, likeable, brilliant young man", last night, police say, confessed to the Jekyll-Hyde murder of 28-year-old crippled John Rockey in order to "stop him from telling my wife I was having an affair".

Weiler, who detectives say gave an emotionless, detailed recounting of the "mad dog" murder and its sordid background of philandering, was arrested yesterday by . . .

The story went on to tell how I had surrendered to Detective Ferguson, but it gave him credit for having talked me into giving myself up so that I "wouldn't be shot on sight". It did not mention Claire Crisponi by name, saying only that she was a neighbour of John's and that she had been "duped" by me. As for Ginny—"Mrs. Weiler, meanwhile, is still being shielded from visitors at her parents' home. Her mother, Mrs. Maxwell Gordon, says that they plan to take her away until this 'hideous mess' is over."

Toward the end of the story was a statement from the District Attorney. It quoted him as saying that "the state will fight with all its resources any attempts to cloak this horrendous murder by a defence of temporary insanity." The last paragraph reported a commendation to Detective Ferguson from the Commissioner of Police, and a promotion to acting detective sergeant.

My preliminary hearing was held the next morning in the police court on the first floor of the Third District station house. Shanahan and Ferguson, flanking me, led me into court. My body still ached from the beating. I wasn't manacled but each officer held an arm while two patrolmen walked in front and another behind. The court-room was jammed. As we entered, a murmur rose wave-like, flashbulbs popped all around and there was a straining of heads to get a better look at me. Momentarily blinded by the flashbulbs, I walked forward as if through mist. I felt drugged. Then someone screamed and tugged at me and spun me around, and now I was looking into the flushed hysterical face of John Rockey's mother.

"You murderer, you murderer, you murderer!" She was pummelling me with her fists but I didn't move, I wanted to be hit, I wanted her to strike me. "You murdered my innocent boy, you murdered my darling, my——"

Patrolmen sprang between us, pulling her away. She kept

fighting to get at me, screaming and moaning, trying to tear loose from the hands that restrained her. I almost collapsed; I would have except that Ferguson and Shanahan held me firm, under the arms now. They headed me toward the bar again while Mrs. Rockey, still shouting, "Murderer! Murderer!" was being led from the court-room. I could even hear her in the corridor after they'd shut the door and above the uproar within the room here and the banging of the magistrate's gavel. Minutes passed before silence could be regained and the magistrate, bringing his gavel down hard, warned that the court-room would be cleared if there was such a disturbance again. He was muttering under his breath as the clerk handed a paper up to him. He read it through silently and handed it back. Sitting at a table just below the bench was the District Attorney. This apparently was too important a case to be turned over to an assistant.

A line of us was standing at the railing in front of the bench. Shanahan and Ferguson remained on either side of me; Lieutenant Thompson was there too and Ruppel and several patrolmen. I gazed downward as the clerk read the warrant aloud, charging me with "wilfully, feloniously, maliciously and premeditatively" causing the death of John Rockey. Then the clerk read off a list of names and said that those people should raise their right hands. I was stunned to hear Claire Crisponi's name and, turning, saw that she was standing behind us along with Inspector Murray, Detective Sands and a man holding a taxi-driver's cap. Claire wore a simple blouse and skirt; her hair was down and there was a dainty ribbon in it. She appeared younger, sad eyed and . . . so very different.

Ferguson nudged me and I looked back and slowly my hand went up for the oath.

Immediately afterwards the District Attorney picked up a sheet of paper and read off Detective Shanahan's name. Shanahan identified himself and under questioning told how he had been the first to investigate Rockey's disappearance. He related how he had visited me twice at the apartment and he emphasised my lie about Rockey having come over for money. Detective Ferguson was called upon next. He explained that he was the arresting officer and repeated his version of my call to Headquarters. Finished, he cleared his throat and clamped arms across his chest. Inspector Murray was the third to testify. He said that he had been actively in charge of the investigation from the

time the body was found. He told about the condition of the body, about the bloodstains found in my apartment, about Dr. Michaels having heard the sound of the struggle and then about my confession which "the defendant here signed of his own free will." The Inspector then pointed to those in the room who had witnessed the signing. He indicated Shanahan, Ruppel, Sands, Ferguson and Lieutenant Thompson. I noticed through blurry eyes that Lieutenant Thompson was gripping the railing with both hands.

The District Attorney glanced at the magistrate, then back to the paper he was holding. He called out another name. This time the man clutching the cab-driver's cap stepped forward. He testified that on the day of the slaying he had taken a fare, a young, heavy-set cripple, to my address. After this the District Attorney read off the name of Claire Crisponi.

Claire edged through to the railing. In a voice that barely could be heard she gave her name and address.

The District Attorney said, "Mrs. Crisponi, do you know the defendant?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm going to have to ask you to speak up. I know how hard this must be for you, Mrs. Crisponi, but just a little louder, please."

"Yes."

"You know him?"

"Yes, sir." Firmly now.

"How long have you known him?"

"Oh"—she shrugged—"I don't know exactly. A long time. Maybe six months."

"What did he tell you his name was?"

She thought. "Weeler." she answered, mispronouncing my name. "Paul Weeler."

"And you knew the dead man, too?"

"Yes, sir. John lived across the hall from me."

"To your knowledge did John Rockey and the defendant ever have a quarrel?"

"Yes."

"When was this?"

"One night a few days before John disappeared."

"What was the quarrel about?"

"John, he told him to stay away from me, to stop bothering me, that otherwise he was going to tell his wife."

"But what happened before that? I mean what caused John to say that?"

"Well, we"—she nodded toward me but without looking—"we'd had a quarrel too. I'd found out he was married and he got angry because I said he shouldn't come around any more. John must have heard the fuss and that's when he came in."

Though I'd learned all this from the detective, hearing it from Claire herself made it almost too much to bear. I wanted to shout the truth, to tell the court, everyone, how in her own way this woman here . . . was guilty . . . so guilty . . . of many things. Staring at the magistrate I was ready to cry out: Lies! Lies!

"And did the defendant ever come back?" the District Attorney asked.

"Yes, sir, he did."

—And yet . . . and yet what good would it do? Hadn't I already tried so many times? Who was here to believe? Who cared? Even I . . . did I really care any more?

"Did you tell John that Weiler had come back, Mrs. Crisponi?"

"Yes, sir, I did. I asked him what to do and he said . . . just leave things up to him."

"Did you know what he meant by that?"

"I sort of imagined he was going to see him. Or like he'd said before, see his wife. John was a good friend and I—well, I didn't know what to do any more. I've been sick and nervous and I've been going to doctors, you see."

Gazing at but actually not even seeing the railing, I was thinking of Peter Crisponi and how, before he'd forgiven her for reasons as mysterious as the souls of men, he had tried to implicate Claire in the Peterson murder. It was all so clear—

"And when did this happen, Mrs. Crisponi? I mean when was the defendant over last?"

"The night before . . . John disappeared."

"That's all, Mrs. Crisponi. Thank you very much."

—Yes, it was so clear to me now, it was all so full of meaning. I could understand, I could feel what Peter Crisponi had felt, I could—

"Hey, you," Ferguson growled, "his Honour's talking to you."

I glanced up. The magistrate said, "Are you represented by counsel?"

I shook my head. The magistrate was saying something else now which I only vaguely heard, about how if I wanted to speak

up in my own defence he wanted it understood that it might be used against me later. Then sitting back he waited.

"... Do you have anything to say?" he demanded.

Falteringly, not sure what I was going to say, aware only that every eye was on me, I mumbled, "I . . . I killed him. I admit I—"

"Your Honour!" came a cry from behind. Everyone at the railing turned. A man had stepped from the crowd. "Your Honour, I don't think it's been made perfectly clear to the defendant that he does not have to speak up! I want to advise him of his legal rights in this matter—and I also want to advise him not to say anything at this moment!"

A tall figure in a rumpled suit, a thin face with a high forehead and a halo of brown hair: the attorney in the Mangus-VanPorter case. What was he doing here?

"And who are you?" the magistrate asked gruffly.

"My name is Arthur Margolis, your Honour. I'm a member of the Bar."

"Are you the defendant's attorney?"

"No, your Honour, but—"

"Your Honour," Inspector Murray shouted, "this man has no business here if he's not Weiler's lawyer! I know this fellow and he's nothing but a trouble maker!"

The magistrate looked at me. "Do you want this man to represent you, Weiler?"

I was all confused. Margolis in my mind recalled only Davenport's death. And then too my father had said something about getting a lawyer. "... No."

The magistrate glared at the attorney like a puffed and angry toad. "Mr. Margolis, whoever you are, I'm going to give you just two and a half seconds to clear out of this court-room, do you hear me?" As Margolis opened his mouth to say something, the magistrate leaped to his feet. "And that's one of them! Now clear out, clear out!"

Margolis walked away. Then he looked back at me. He was trying to tell me something with his eyes. The magistrate remained standing even after the attorney had left. When he sat down, he wiped his face and fumbled with papers and seemed to forget at what point the hearing stood. With effort he calmed himself. Then glancing at the door as though expecting Margolis to return he explained to me that I did not have to speak up if I didn't want to.

"Now for the last time do you have anything to say?"

I was thinking of Margolis as I shook my head.

The magistrate then said that a *prima facie* case of homicide had been established and he ordered me held without bail on a charge of first-degree murder. His gavel came down heavily. Ferguson and Shanahan caught me by the arms at the same time. They led me out of the court-room and down to the cell. I stood against the bars as they locked the door. Later I went back to the cot and, sitting on it, smoked cigarette after cigarette as I stared blankly at the wall.

It was about twenty minutes afterwards that the turnkey opened the door. Behind him stood J. Arthur Margolis.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE turnkey left, locking us in. Margolis, looking unsure of himself, stood near the door as I stared at him warily from the cot.¹ Then he said, "I hope you don't mind my coming to see you, Paul."

I didn't move or say anything; I just watched him. Why was he here? Why this man of all people? Despite what had happened at the hearing, I could not help but be suspicious of him. I had become suspicious of everyone.

"I'm sorry about the commotion I caused upstairs," he said, "but I didn't want you to say anything that might work against you later. It was important you didn't say anything." An uneasy silence followed; I kept staring. "Paul, you probably resent me for . . . what I did to you that time. But try to understand this. I was fighting for an innocent boy then. VanPorter was innocent and . . . I was fighting for him, for justice for him. Paul," he said as I still remained silent, "I'm not here for personal satisfaction, I'm not here to lecture you or hurt you or——"

"What do you want?" My voice sounded hoarse, as though I hadn't spoke aloud in years.

"I . . . just want to talk to you. I want to know what happened."

"It's . . . all in the papers." I crossed my arms on my knees and looked down.

"I want to hear it from you. Paul, I want to know how and why it happened. I want to know everything. And, Paul, maybe . . . maybe I can even help you."

He reminded me of Lieutenant Thompson. Thompson who also had wanted to "help". My jaws hardened.

"Will you talk to me?" he asked.

". . . There's nothing to talk about."

"Just tell me what happened. I want to know what happened."

I locked up fiercely. "Why?" Then, out of weariness, "What's the difference what happened?" and I lowered my eyes once more.

"Paul . . ." He was walking closer. Now he sat next to me

on the cot. "Paul, do you want to know the real reason why I've come here? Will you listen to me? You don't have to say anything, just listen. Paul, there are many people who think I'm a fool. To them I'm that crazy Margolis who's up there fighting his damn head off for all kinds of unpopular causes and injustices. I'm that crazy Margolis who gets into fights with police and judges, who gets himself kicked out of court-rooms. I'm that madman who was editor-in-chief of the law review and had every opportunity to be with some of the biggest firms in the city and yet who practices a damn-fool kind of law where your kid comes home and asks is it true you're a Red like Johnny's father says. And, Paul, sometimes I've wondered if they weren't right, if actually I'm not out of my mind for having . . . ideals. But you're teaching me something in a way. You're teaching me it isn't ideals alone that's made me fight for the . . . underdog. No, Paul, I think a lot of it is actually I'm scared. I think a good part of it is because I'm scared I might be that VanPorter accused of a crime he didn't commit. I'm scared the innocent man I'm battling for might by some twist of events be *me*, that the man whose rights I'm trying to protect could be me also. I think I've really been doing this for . . . for selfish reasons. Do you understand me?"

I didn't answer. I rubbed my forehead and for some reason shivered.

"Paul, when I read about you my first reaction was one of shock. But after the shock passed I became aware of something else. Fear. It scared me, Paul, thinking you could kill. It still does. You frighten me because I don't think you're that much different from me. If you can kill then I can also. Whatever is in you is probably in most of us, just waiting for the right combination of circumstances to bring it out. . . . Paul, did you ever think that one day you'd kill someone? Of course you didn't, I know you didn't. Then how do I know about myself? How do any of us know? Paul, perhaps that's a selfish reason for coming here, for wanting to know all about . . . it, for offering help, but I do want to know and maybe I can help. Will you talk to me, Paul? Will you trust me?" When I still could say nothing, "Do you want me to leave? Is that it? I realise I have no right——"

I kept rubbing my forehead, eyes closed, not sure what I wanted. He stood up. He was hesitant to leave. "Paul, will you tell me just one thing? Did it happen the way the papers say?"

• "What's the difference, my God, what's the difference?"

"Just tell me, won't you? Did it . . . the way they say?"

. . . Slowly, as though to myself, I shook my head.

I felt the cot give as he sat down next to me again. "You did kill him, though, didn't you?"

"Yes," I answered hollowly, "yes, I killed him."

"Why? Will you tell me why?"

"Please, I—" How could I go into it again? And for what purpose?

"Tell me how you first met him, Paul."

" . . . It was"—I took a long breath—"it was on a story." Suddenly this seemed easier than having him badger me.

"Was this when you met Mrs. Crisponi?"

" . . . Yes." And now gazing at the floor I was going through it once more just as I had done for the police. But this time I told it mechanically and without thought or hope of belief; and, finished, I shrugged to tell him that that was it and then rested my forehead on my palms again.

"But, Paul, the . . . the confession . . . the confession you signed——" Then, with an intake of breath, "Paul, did they . . . force it from you?"

I nodded against my hands.

"They beat you? They—— Paul, are you telling me the truth?"

I turned to him slowly. His dark moist eyes probed mine as I looked up. Then he shook his head and muttered, "Oh, those bastards, those dirty rotten bastards!"

He . . . believed me. It seemed incredible and it took time before I realised it and then I searched his face but all I could find was further evidence of his belief. A flush of exultancy swept through me—but only to vanish just as quickly. Yes, he believed; but so what? So what? What did it matter? It was as though I had wanted someone to believe me for so long that now . . . now it had become unimportant.

"And the trouble is," Margolis said grimly, "you're going to have one devil of a job proving you were beaten. Most judges know what's going on but they just close their eyes. I remember in the VanPorter thing I tried to get it on record at the hearing that the boy's confession was forced from him—and do you know what the magistrate said? He said he'd heard this story so many times he was beginning to doubt if a guilty man had ever appeared before him. And everyone . . . everyone just laughed."

He got to his feet, his face taut and angry. "Paul, I don't know what I can do, I can't promise you anything, but if you have no one else . . . I'd like to fight this thing with you. Believe me I didn't come here for a . . . for a *client*, I came here—as I've been trying to tell you—for *myself*. But if you want me to, I'd like to . . . try to help. Would you want me to?"

I had come to respect this man; I believed in his sincerity; yet I still could not express an emotion; perhaps this, too, had been beaten out of me. So all I could do was shrug and say, "It's up to you."

"But you'll have to help me, Paul. I can't possibly fight this alone. Paul," he said, leaning his back against the bars, "it would be foolish for me to keep anything from you. I wouldn't be doing you any good that way." He sat next to me again. "What I'm trying to tell you is that this is going to be a tough battle, a hell of a tough battle. What's going to make it especially rough is the confession you signed and that story you wrote under Mrs. Crisponi's name, painting her as all sweetness and light. And then . . . then there's something else. Paul," he went on as though hating to say this, "when you go on trial the indictment against you is going to be for murder. Yet actually in the minds of the jurors you're also going to be on trial for something else. For immorality. Paul, I know as true as we're sitting here that the greatest prejudicial factor against you, aside from the fact that Rockey was a cripple, will be the affair you had with Mrs. Crisponi. Paul, I"—he gripped my knee—"I only wish we could soften that affair somehow or try to explain it away. If she was—Paul, just between ourselves—if Mrs. Crisponi was the bitch you say she was, why did you keep going back to her? I know it may sound stupid of me but maybe . . . there is something, some way we can explain the hold she had on you."

How could I tell anyone what had driven me to Claire Crisponi? To reveal that in court, to hurt and embarrass Ginny in such a way, would be to me a crime almost as great as murder. Peter Crisponi had died carrying many secrets with him to the grave; if I had to die, I would carry with me mine.

"Was there . . . something, Paul?"

" . . . No."

"Then why do you look so pained? You're . . . acting strange, almost like you're hiding—"

"Mr. Margolis"—I whirled away—"will you let me alone?"

"I . . . I'm sorry, Paul. It's just that I'm looking for every

possible angle. And you *must* help me . . . Paul, you haven't given up on yourself, have you?"

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know. Maybe I'll just plead guilty and get it over with."

"Plead guilty . . . to something that's not true? . . . Paul, a judge won't necessarily be more lenient than a jury—especially not with what you'll be pleading guilty to. If I thought you'd have a better chance that way, I'd—Paul," he said almost in horror, "you don't . . . you don't want to die, do you?"

"What's the difference?"

"Paul, you mustn't—"

"Mr. Margolis"—I raised my head from my hands—"Mr. Margolis, I don't think I really care. I may be scared to die, I don't know, but beyond that . . . I don't think I actually care. Mr. Margolis, there's a time when you want to live so badly you can taste it and you scream out the truth but there's no one to listen and then you realise there's no use trying to make them understand. They kill you . . . they kill you a lot of times, Mr. Margolis, and I don't think the last time can be any worse than the first. Maybe it'll even be easier. Mr. Margolis, I—I'm tired . . . I'm so tired of . . . everything."

"Paul, don't talk like—"

"Why? What's there to live for? To exist in a cell when everything you want and love is out . . . out there? Why don't you just let me die? Why should you even . . . care?"

"Paul"—it took effort for him to talk—"Paul, when you ask me that, I look at you, I look at a young man and I think . . . I think of the waste it would be, the terrible waste. Paul, listen to me. All my adult life I've fought the barbarism of capital punishment. I'm against it in every case but never so . . . so angrily as in a . . . crime like this, a crime of sudden passion, a crime where a man just loses . . . reason. Paul, to me you're not an evil person. Yes, you've done an evil thing but you yourself I can't think of as . . . more evil, less human, than most of us. In fact, how you've described it to me, the murder itself was a rejection of evil, the vomiting up of it. Paul, to me you're less dangerous than the car thief, the bank robber, the pickpocket, the gunman who shoots but merely wounds, even the crooked police officer. You're infinitely less of a menace than those of us walking the streets with a murder still in us, for you . . . you'll never kill again, I know it. To put you in a common package called murderer, to execute you out of revenge and like a hardened

criminal—to me, Paul, to me that's a terrible waste of a man. We try to salvage the pickpocket, the thief, then"—he gestured—"then why not the man who's killed and will not kill again? If we salvage the others . . . why not him? Paul"—the guard had come forward and was unlocking the cell—"Paul, don't give up on yourself. Don't let them make a brute out of you. That's what they want you to be—a brute. It's easier for them to think of you as . . . something different from themselves, as something not quite human. It makes their job easier and they don't have to think about it . . . later. You don't worry them that way. Paul, if you believe in yourself, if you know your own heart, if you have faith in yourself, then all they can do is brutalise themselves and they can't even reach you. And that's the first thing you must fight for"—the door was opening—"belief in yourself. Paul, don't give up, don't give in to them. If you believe in yourself, in the purpose of your existence, even these walls, these bars, won't hold you in. You'll be freer than most of us . . . outside. Much freer, Paul."

Margolis stood up reluctantly as the turnkey entered.

"Paul, I'll try to see you tomorrow or the day after. Is there anything I can do for you?"

I shook my head. He took my hand that was hanging limply and held it between both of his. "Good-bye, Paul. And try to be . . . try to be strong."

I nodded: I felt that if I tried to say anything I would cry.

Outside the bars he held up a fist and shook it, his face grim. Then he started to leave. In a sudden rush of loneliness I pressed my face against the bars and called, "Mr. Margolis!"

He came back. "Yes, Paul?"

"There . . . is something you can do for me."

"What is it?"

"Would you . . . go see my wife, Mr. Margolis?"

"Of course I will, Paul."

"And will you tell her something? Will you tell her I asked her to forgive me? Would you"—tears were spilling over—"would you do that for me, Mr. Margolis?"

"You know I will, Paul."

"And . . . something else. Tell her . . . tell her I love her."

"All right, Paul." He nodded and, eyes filling up, started to move away. He was walking up the corridor, I clutched the bars, then squeezed my face between them and cried, "Mr. Margolis, don't tell her I love her! Don't say that! It's better for her

you . . . don't say that. Just . . . ask her to forgive me, that's all."

He nodded again and was gone.

That same afternoon I was transferred to the county prison. Given a blue shirt and dungarees to wear, I was placed in a cell whose single-barged window overlooked the walls. In the distance was the skyline of the city—almost a phantasy, a misty Baghdad. I stood by that window for hours. Margolis had stirred me from the dead and now I was thinking of Ginny and if she would give him a message for me.

Margolis came to see me two days later. A guard led me into a small room off the tier of cells, where the attorney was waiting, and left us there by ourselves. He kept the door open though and watched us from outside. While I waited anxiously for news of Ginny, Margolis told me that he'd spoken to my parents and that both of them were as well as could be expected and that they had discussed plans for calling in a psychiatrist to help map a defence. "What's going to happen," he explained while I listened restlessly, "is that the state's probably going to do the same and it'll end up in a battle between psychiatrists." He had a few good men in mind, he said, and went on in detail about their qualifications; and all the time I kept thinking: *tell me of Ginny!* It wasn't until it was almost time to go that Margolis's face changed expression and he said quietly, "I didn't know whether to tell you . . . but I did see your wife and—Paul, try not to blame her. It's really her mother. She's completely under her mother's thumb. Mrs. Gordon didn't even want me to see her but I was talking loud downstairs and—well, she came down. Paul . . . it's . . . I think if it were murder alone, I think it would be easier for your wife to forgive. But I think it's this other, this business of you and Mrs. Crisponi, that makes . . . that makes it harder for her. I really believe that the affair is the hardest part of it for her to understand. . . . Paul, I'll try to see her again, all right? Maybe it was too soon. . . . All right, Paul?"

But I was walking out of the room toward the guard.

"Paul——" Margolis called after me.

I didn't look back.

After this I withdrew once more into myself, into the warm soft womb of my being. Margolis visited me often but there no longer was a response within me to his enticements back into the

world again: I wanted never to think or hope, for there were but companions of pain and despair. In the days that passed I lived in a vacuum of sleep and waking, of eating without appetite, of smoking many cigarettes, of standing by the window, of walking alone in the exercise yard. Sometimes though I had nightmares: I would dream of the murder or the electric chair or Ferguson beating me or people just staring. But during the day these things did not trouble me. Only at night too did I think once in a while of God.

The coroner's inquest that followed my preliminary hearing was quick and routine. Margolis didn't put me on the stand and after some police testimony I was held for the grand jury. It was about two weeks after this that a prisoner sauntered up to me in the exercise yard, looked around, opened my shirt and slipped in a magazine. "You're some big shot, fellow," he commented, strolling away.

In my cell I took out the magazine. It was the current issue of *Topnotch Detective*. My crime was the feature story:

RIDDLE OF THE PHILANDERING FIEND AND THE CRIPPLED CADAVER

The blurb underneath read:

BECAUSE A MAN WAS NOT SATISFIED WITH ONE
HOME, AN INNOCENT WAS TO DIE AND A
CITY COWER. HOW FIND HIM BEFORE
HE KILLED AGAIN?

There was a snapshot of me that had been taken before I entered the army—"He was not satisfied merely writing about murders. He had to live one for himself." One of Ginny—"She did not know her own husband, or the secret of his car trunk." A picture of Rockey—"Because he tried to protect a defenceless woman, his became a woodland grave." There was a shot of Claire Crisponi—"Twice betrayed by the ones she loved." Detective Ferguson was pictured at Headquarters—"He refused to be fooled by a murderer's tricks." And a photograph of a crutch, one end retouched a bright dripping scarlet—"A support in life, a weapon of death."

As I read the story, sitting on the cot, it was as though I had before me an account of someone else's crime.

"What are you going to do?" John Rockey gasped. "What do you want from me?" He tried to manœuvre his crutches in a futile attempt to escape. The man who was to be his killer drew closer, his face revealing the murderous purpose of his heart.

"You can't run away," the man's voice taunted. "You know you can't run away from me."

"Please——" Rockey whimpered.

The crutches were pulled from him and he sank helplessly to the floor. He held up his hands to cover his face. He cried for mercy, this youth, but there was no one to hear. He begged for his life but there was no one to listen. The man hovered over him, a crutch clasped in both hands. The crutch rose and fell, rose and fell, like a hammer relentlessly rapping a nail into a coffin.

Afterwards the murderer straightened. He wasn't panicky. He knew what he was going to do now. He was thinking of a place called Taberton Hollow. He had good reason to recall Taberton Hollow. . . .

Several days later the horribly bludgeoned body of the 28-year-old Rockey lay exposed in a shallow grave. The police, case-hardened though they were, could not restrain a shudder as they looked down upon the innocent victim, his face torn and bloody.

"The electric chair is too good for the fiend who did this," muttered Lieutenant Alvin Thompson, chief of the Homicide Squad.

The discovery of the body came as a result of . . .

I put the magazine down but only to go back to it and read on. The story was almost entirely invented. It had the police arrest five persons before they came to me, and I became a suspect because of a mechanical pencil that had been found near the grave—a pencil which Lieutenant Thompson recalled as having seen me use while taking notes. The story gave full credit to Ferguson for having brought me in, but it embellished it by having him trace my call. My confession was attributed to "adroit questioning" and "when confronted with all the evidence against him, Weiler blurted out the truth." The story trailed off with "Paul Weiler, grimly aware that there is no such thing as a perfect crime, is awaiting indictment by the grand jury as *Topnotch Detective* goes to press." After that in

italics was the list of fictitious names for the innocent suspects and those who might have been libelled in any other way.

The story ran over to the last page of the magazine and there also, boxed in the centre of the page, was a column headed Latest Developments. Here were listed the final legal dispositions of cases that had been published before trial in earlier issues. Shutting the magazine on my finger, I let myself wonder what that box would say of me one day. Then reflectively I turned to the beginning of the story again.

For the first time now I took notice of the by-line. It was D. R. Connor. The thought that exploded in me seemed too fantastic even to be considered and I tried to reject it. But another glance at the writing left me no doubt as to who was the author. I knew Dan O'Connor's style too well.

Dan also? Dan along with Ferguson and all the rest? I stood up from the cot and went to the window. I realised I was still holding the magazine and I threw it fluttering to the far side of the cell. . . . And yet, even though I tried, I could not hate Dan. How could I hate him for . . . what I had taught him, for something I myself had done to so many others? Not only by deliberate lies but by indifference, by sensationalising, by smug moralising, by hint and by accusation.

"I walked from the window to the door to the window again.

All around me had been the material for numberless honest stories and novels; I had had the opportunity to probe men's souls, their emotions, to examine the fabric of their lives but yet I had not cared. I had remained disinterested. I had searched every place but at my feet for the stuff of good writing; and, scraping the surface for dirt, I had ignored the actual gold beneath.

Paul, remember that pale girl with the gentle eyes and soft brown hair whose husband had robbed a bank and his name was tattooed on her pretty ankle? And the knotted shirt a cop showed you that a prisoner had hanged himself with in his cell, tying it to the top bunk and then, because there was little room, bending his knees? Remember too the detective who told you, "I didn't aim for the back of his head, I tripped!" and smiled a little? And that man, remember him, the one who showed you a picture of a boy on a pony and wept that he grew up to be a murderer? And what about the bloodstains on the fat part of a baseball bat that a cop swung over his shoulder, grinning, "Put it down the middle, right down the middle"? And the

men and women you used to see come out of the police vans, sombre-faced and eyes down; and all the Peter Crisponis, and remember that young kleptomaniac who needed money for a new trial? And the rest of them, those blurred and nameless faces . . . remember? Paul, what were their stories, what really were their stories?

When Margolis came to visit me a few days later, I showed him the magazine. Perhaps I deliberately wanted to hurt myself. But he barely glanced at the story and put it aside.

"If I were you," I said, "I don't think I could keep myself from laughing."

"Paul," he sighed, "do we have to go through that again? Do you still trust me that little?"

". . . No. I'm sorry. I'm very sorry." We were sitting across a table from each other in that room off the cells. Outside stood the guard, a foot on the railing, peering down at the lower tier. I put my head on my folded arms.

"What is it, Paul?" Margolis asked.

I shrugged.

"Can't you tell me? Can't you trust me enough to tell me?"

I raised myself gradually. This was hard to say. "Mr. Margolis . . . do you think I'm going to die?"

He seemed to wince a little. "I thought . . . you didn't care, Paul."

"I don't know. I've . . . just been thinking."

"About what?"

"Oh——" Then I shook my head. "Nothing."

"I want to know, Paul."

"It's just that——" But I didn't know how to say it. I tried again. "Do you remember what you told me that time about . . . being free? About being in prison and maybe still being freer than a lot of people on the outside?"

"Yes, I remember, Paul."

"I've been thinking about that these past couple of days. I didn't want to think, I've tried not to, but reading . . . reading that story . . . well, it sort of brought things on. It's made me look back and wonder. Do you know something, Mr. Margolis?" All at once I wanted to talk; there was so much within me I wanted to say. "When I look back I realise that I wasn't free at all. Actually I was free to do whatever I damn pleased and yet . . . I was never free, really free, that is. It was like I was held

in chains I couldn't see but which were there just the same. Is that . . . is that something like what you meant, Mr. Margolis?"

He nodded slightly, his face grave.

"I knew how I wanted to live, I knew the kind of writing that was in me . . . yet I just couldn't free myself from so many . . . damn petty fears and doubts. I couldn't tear those from myself, from that part of me that said you had to be practical, you had to conform, you had to be logical. I'd tell myself tomorrow's going to be different, tomorrow I'll stop hacking, tomorrow I'll go away with Ginny and I'll do, I'll fulfil what I know is inside of me. But it was always tomorrow. Mr. Margolis, I compromised, I rationalised, I was afraid of every stupid stinking thing, I——"

"Paul, don't you realise that most of us live that way? You've got to stop torturing yourself," he pleaded.

"But don't you see what I'm trying to say, Mr. Margolis? Those things that kept me back . . . they're gone. All those worries and fears and guilts, those doubts, those . . . everything—they're insignificant now. I'm out of those chains, Mr. Margolis. Life's been . . . it's been stripped to the bone for me. Everything's in focus. I know what's important now and what's not. Mr. Margolis, I—I'm freer in many ways than I've ever been before. If they . . . if they gave me a chance, if they could understand the way I feel, I think I could do so much, I think I've got so much to offer now. Do you understand me, Mr. Margolis? Do I make any sense at all?"

"Yes . . . yes, you make a lot of sense."

"I don't want to die, Mr. Margolis," I said after a moment, looking at my hands. "I know that I don't want to die."

"But, Paul, we're not licked! We're going to fight them and you're going to help me fight."

"I don't think it's just because I'm scared to die, either," I said, barely hearing. "Mr. Margolis, I want to live because . . . there's so much I know I can do. I think I've found myself in so many ways, I think I've found a purpose for myself. Just lying on my cot or looking out the window, I think I've seen and felt more of life these past couple of days than I ever had before. There's so many books . . . so many stories . . . I could write. I don't think I would ever have to leave that cell to be able to write . . . and write well. Do you know what my punishment is right now, Mr. Margolis? It's not being in prison, it's not

what they'll do to me. They can't punish me any more that way. It's knowing how I wasted my life, realising all the things I might have done. God, if there's a hell somewhere I bet it's a place where they just sit you down and let you think, where they give you a billion years to regret. To me that'd be worse than brimstone and fire."

I stood up. I was too restless to sit. The guard lifted his foot from the railing and watched me.

"A cop told me something I remember," I said, my back turned to the lawyer. "I met him before he was to take a man to the death house. I think the man's name was Morgan or something like that. I asked this cop how he thought Morgan would take it and he told me he believed he knew the man well enough to predict how he would go. He said he was pretty sure that when Morgan sat on the electric chair, he would grasp its arms and try to tug it a little just like he wanted to make himself comfortable, because that's what he always did when he sat down. I saw this cop later and he'd witnessed the electrocution and he told me that that was exactly the way it had happened. Morgan had sat down quietly, gave the arms a tug like he was at the dinner-table and his face had been calm." I turned around. "Mr. Margolis, I don't know if I could die like that. But I think I might . . . if I could live long enough to do some of the things I want to, if I could just . . . be true to myself . . . a little. There's so much I want to write about but maybe . . . maybe one story would be enough, one story written the way I should have been able to write all the others. If that happened I think . . . I think I could sit down the way Morgan did. And it wouldn't be because I was bitter or didn't care . . . but because I'd done something worthwhile. If I could do that then there wouldn't be any hell I'd be afraid of. Do you know what I mean, Mr. Margolis?"

"I . . . think I do," he answered huskily.

"Mr. Margolis, do you think the people out there . . . do you think they want to know about a guy like me? I know the kind of stuff they want to read . . . God, I wrote enough of it . . . but do you think they want to know the truth? You said that the cops had to think of me as something different from themselves, that it made things easier for them, that they wouldn't have to worry then. If that's true, then the people out there wouldn't want to know either, would they? I think they'd be afraid to find out I'm a human being also and not too different

from most of them. It's like an ugly person being scared to look in a mirror. They want to think of me as a fiend because otherwise it would scare them. And they'd rather kill the fiend without examining him, without looking at him closer. . . . Mr. Margolis, do you think though that maybe they would want to know?"

"I . . . wish I could tell you, Paul. I only wish I could tell you."

The guard was coming in now. Margolis stood up. He fumbled nervously with his brief-case.

"Mr. Margolis?"

"Yes, Paul."

"I'm going to try. I'm going to try to tell them."

He nodded and kept his eyes down.

"Even if they don't want to listen, Mr. Margolis, I'm going to try."

"Yes." It was almost a whisper.

"And, Mr. Margolis, if I do . . . if I do what I'm going to try to do . . . whatever happens don't feel sorry for me. There won't be any need to feel sorry for me. All right?"

"Yes."

The guard touched my arm.

"Good-bye, Mr. Margolis. I . . . I'm okay now. I really mean that. I'm . . . fine."

"I'm . . . glad. I'm very glad. Good-bye, Paul. I'll . . . try to be back soon."

I started to leave with the guard. I stopped. "Mr. Margolis? Thank you for helping me . . . know myself."

"I can . . . thank you for the same thing, Paul."

The guard led me down the row of cells. My cell door was open. He locked it behind me. I walked slowly to the window. Out there the skyline: people in offices, people in cars, people shopping and walking and going to the movies and making love and quarrelling. I rose up on my toes and grasped the bars.

Hello! Hello, all of you, do you hear me out there? Can you hear?

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

On 12 May 1952, Paul Weiler was indicted for first-degree murder. He went on trial on 3 June 1952, and was found guilty by a jury. A week later he was sentenced to die by Judge Thomas L. Mortimer. Appeals for a new trial and clemency failing, at eleven p.m. on 12 January 1953, Weiler died in the electric chair at the Northern State Penitentiary. His body was claimed by his parents.

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